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Groundwater nitrate levels high in 440 districts: Report

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Market surges 2% on buying in financial, IT stocks

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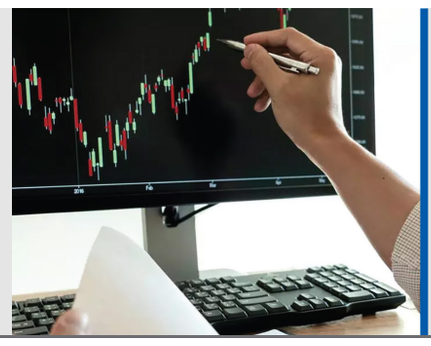

SPORTS

CT: PCB races against time for stadium renovation

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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2025 TO GET PRICIER FOR K'TAKA CITIZENS

Cabinet decides to increase bus fare by 15%

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday decided to increase the bus fares in the State-owned transport corporations by 15 per cent.

The decision was taken in view of the substantial hike in operational costs such as increase in spending on fuel prices and staff, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil said.

BJP lashed out at Congress government. Patil said the decision will come into effect from 5 January.

The move is expected to generate Rs 74.85 crore monthly and about Rs 784 crore annually.

"The cabinet has decided to revise the bus fare of the four state transport corporations -- KSRTC, NWKRTC, KKRTC and BMTC by 15 per cent," he said.

According to Patil, the BMTC bus fares were increased on 10 January, 2015 when the diesel prices were Rs 60.90 per litre.

"The daily diesel consumption was Rs 9.16 crore 10 years ago by the four corporations, which has now increased to Rs 13.21 crore. The expenditure on staff in these four corporations was Rs 12.95 crore daily, which has increased to Rs 18.36 crore daily. Hence the revision was necessary," he said justifying the hike.

The Minister also underlined that 'Shakti' guarantee will continue.

In the current fiscal, Rs 5,015 crore has been earmarked for the 'Shakti' scheme, the Minister explained. Patil said, "Every month the state government is releasing Rs 417.92 crore grant to these four corporations. This will not be a burden on the state finance."

Patil also said the state government has cleared all the provident fund dues to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore. —*PTI*

BWSSB to hike water tariff from mid-January

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is poised to implement a revision of water tariffs in the City, likely coinciding with the Sankranti festival in mid-January. This anticipated hike has raised concerns among residents who are already facing rising costs, including a proposed bus fare increase by the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC).

Sources within BWSSB indicate that the proposed tariff revision will be deliberated in a meeting chaired by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in the second week of January, with local MLAs playing a significant role in the discussions.

BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasat Manohar has reached out to all MLAs representing Bengaluru, urging their support for the tariff increase. In a letter, he highlighted the board's precarious financial state, noting the last adjustment occurred in November 2014.

An official from BWSSB explained that the board incurs a cost of Rs 52 to supply 1,000 litres of water, yet only recovers between Rs 25 and Rs 40. "This disparity results in monthly losses of approximately Rs 41 crore," the official stated, citing rising operational costs, particularly electricity, and the financial burden from the completed fifth phase of the Cauvery water supply project as contributing factors. Without a revision, BWSSB projects a potential loss of Rs 4,860 crore over the next five years.

Details of the exact tariff increase will be confirmed post-meeting, with an announcement expected from the Deputy Chief Minister soon. BWSSB has urged residents to recognise the necessity of this adjustment to maintain essential services. —*Salar News*

KSRTC MALE WORKERS GET 180 CHILDCARE LEAVES

Single KSRTC male employees, including those unmarried, divorced, or widowers, are now entitled to 180 days of childcare leave. However, leave will be cancelled if the employee marries during this period.

KIADB gets ₹5K cr, Hubballi-Dharwad Corporation split

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Karnataka cabinet on Thursday decided to increase the borrowing limit of the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) from financial institutions from Rs 500 crore to Rs 5,000 crore.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said the decision was made because KIADB is acquiring 28,741 acres of land for the development of 24 industrial areas across the state.

Patil added that developing these industrial areas would require at least Rs 32,380 crore, including Rs 26,505 crore for land acquisition.

The Cabinet also decided to bifurcate the Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation and create a separate urban local body to govern Dharwad city.

Hubballi-Dharwad Mahanagara Palike currently exists. Dharwad is known as Karnataka's cultural centre, the Karmabhoomi of four Jnanpith award winners—DR Bendre, VK Gokak, Girish Karnad, and it is also called Vidya Kashi.

HK Patil *PHOTO: PTI*

- Cabinet also decided to cancel the third phase of the white topping of roads.

Today, the Cabivnet decided to create a separate Mahanagara Pavlike for Dharwad, Patil said.

The Cabinet also granted administrative approval to strengthen the existing 14 Goshalas at Rs 10.5 crore, Patil said.

The Cabinet also decided to cancel the third phase of the white topping of roads within Bengaluru's municipal limits, Patil said.

He further noted that the total cost for white topping 92 roads covering 119 km was estimated at Rs 1,172 crore. —*PTI*

1st train for Yellow Line to be dispatched on 6 Jan

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

The eagerly awaited Yellow Line of Namma Metro, dubbed the IT Corridor, is on course to enhance the city's transport infrastructure, as Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya announced that the first train will be dispatched on 6 January.

Following numerous delays attributed to train availability issues, production has now accelerated to meet the new timeline. The Yellow Line will connect RV Road to major companies like Infosys and Biocon, extending to Bommasandra via Electronic City. With a budget of Rs 5,745 crore, the project aims to significantly improve connectivity for Bengaluru's bustling IT sector.

Surya posted on X (formerly Twitter) that production will see Titagarh Rail Systems provide one train per month initially, increasing to two trains by September 2025. "I have coordinated closely with Titagarh Rail Systems to resolve challenges, including securing engineers' VISAs," he stated.

Spanning 18.82 kilometres, the elevated line will boast 16 stations, facilitating smoother commutes in the area. Key stations include BTM Layout and the towering Jayadeva Hospital station, which will offer interchange options with other lines. Despite the positive updates, frustrations linger due to historical delays. City residents expressed mixed feelings about the prolonged construction, with calls for better infrastructure and last-mile connectivity solutions. As one local remarked, "We also need proper parking facilities alongside this new metro service." —*PTI*

Bashar Assad poisoned in Moscow: Report

LONDON, 2 JAN

An assassination attempt by poisoning has been made on former Syrian dictator Bashar Assad, The Sun reported.

The ousted leader reportedly fell ill on Sunday in Moscow, where he has resided since fleeing Syria in early December.

Assad, 59, requested medical help then began to "cough violently and choke," according to online account General SVR, which is believed to be run by a former top spy in Russia.

"There is every reason to believe an assassination attempt was made," it added.

Assad was treated in his apartment, and his condition is said to have stabilized by Monday. He was confirmed to have been poisoned by medical testing, the account said, without citing direct sources.

There has been no confirmation of the event from the Russian government. —*Courtesy, Arab News*

ROHIT'S FUTURE GAMBHIR

Skipper Rohit to be dropped? Bumrah set for leadership

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

The question was simple. Will Rohit Sharma play in the fifth and final Test against Australia?

Had Sharma's position been secure, the answer should have been "Yes." Yet, India head coach Gautam Gambhir's response at a pre-match press conference was: "We will take a call on the playing XI after looking at the pitch."

This sparked speculation that the out-of-form skipper was no longer sure of his place in the playing XI.

Within few hours, it swirled into near confirmation that Rohit is set to become the first serving Indian captain who would be dropped for poor form.

Rohit the batter has been battered by extra bounce and seam movement and Rohit the skipper has been left bruised by the scathing criticism of his leadership.

Rohit, just like in Melbourne, was last among recognised batters to enter the nets, and if he is dropped he would have no one to blame except the abysmal return of 31 runs from five innings.

If the expected happens, pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been the team's top performer with 30 wickets in four outings at a sub-20 average, will take over the leadership role.

In Rohit's case, he will be dropped on the basis of form after Gambhir made it clear that performance is the only thing that would keep a player in the dressing room.

If he doesn't come out for toss on Friday, it would be safe to conclude that Rohit played his last knock at the MCG earlier this week where he looked completely out of place on a good track. —*PTI*

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Tesla Cybertruck explodes near Trump's hotel

LAS VEGAS, 2 JAN

A Tesla Cybertruck exploded and burst into flames near Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, killing a person inside the vehicle and injuring several others standing nearby, local officials said.Firework mortars and camp fuel canisters were found stuffed into the back of the Tesla Cybertruck sparking an intense investigation into possible terrorism. Video presented at an afternoon news conference showed a tumble of charred fireworks mortars, cannisters and other explosive devices crowded into the back of the pickup. The truck bed walls were still intact because the blast shot straight up rather than to the sides. —*PTI*

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Woman chops up hubby as he tries to rape daughter

BELAGAVI, 2 JAN

A 30-year-old woman in Belagavi murdered her 59-year-old husband after he allegedly attempted to rape their daughter after she refused to sleep with him. The woman later chopped the body into two pieces and threw it to a nearby agriculture field. According to Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled, Savitri Itnal killed her husband, Srimanth Itnal, by bludgeoning him to death with a large stone while he was asleep in an intoxicated state. The incident occurred on Wednesday night at Umrani village in Chikkodi. —*Salar News*

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TMC councillor shot dead in Malda, Didi shocked

MALDA (WB), 2 JAN

Trinamool Congress (TMC) councillor Dulal Sarkar on Thursday was shot dead by unidentified assailants in the Jhaljhalia More area of Malda district, according to police reports. Sarkar, who was affectionately known as Babla, was targeted while riding his bike and was shot multiple times at close range. Emergency services rushed him to a local hospital, where he tragically succumbed to his injuries. West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC leader Mamata Banerjee expressed her deep shock over the incident. In a post on X, she paid tribute to Sarkar, stating, "My close associate and a very popular leader, Babla Sarkar, has been murdered today." —*PTI*

Bangladesh court denies bail to ISKCON monk

CHATTOGRAM, 2 JAN

A court in Chattogram has denied bail to Hindu monk and former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das, who faces sedition charges. Das appeared virtually in court as 11 lawyers presented his bail petition during a hearing that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Judge Mohammad Saiful Islam ultimately rejected the application after hearing arguments from both the defence and prosecution. Arrested at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on 25 November, Das was accused of allegedly "desecrating" the national flag. His arrest triggered violence, resulting in a government prosecutor's death and escalating tensions within the community. "The allegation of disrespecting the national flag is baseless," countered defence counsel Apurba Bhattacharya. —*PTI*

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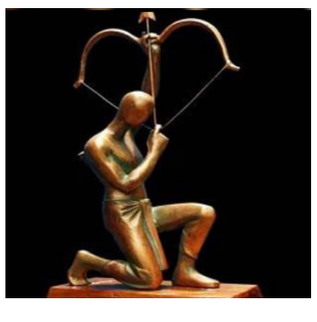
NO CRICKETERS

Manu, Gukesh among Khel Ratnas; 17 para-athletes to get Arjuna

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN



The Indian Sports Ministry has announced the recipients of the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award for 2024, with double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker and chess prodigy D Gukesh among the esteemed winners.

The announcement, made on Thursday, also highlighted an exceptional recognition of para-athletes, with 17 out of 32 Arjuna awardees being recognised for their stellar performances at the Paris Paralympics.

Joining Bhaker as Khel Ratna awardees are men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and para-athlete Praveen Kumar. At just 22 years old, Bhaker made history as the first athlete from independent India to claim two medals in a single Olympic Games, achieving bronze in both the women's 10m air pistol individual and mixed team events. Concerns had arisen regarding her nomination when the selection committee initially did not recommend her, citing the absence of a nomination application. In a remarkable recognition of para-athletes, the Arjuna awardees for this year also feature Olympic bronze medallists wrestlers Aman Sehrawat, shooters Swapnil Kusale and Sarabjot Singh, among others. The para-athletes lead this year's list following a historic achievement at the Paris Paralympics, where they won 29 medals, including seven golds and nine silvers. —*PTI*

Salar News, cops unmask fake loan scam

HAMEED ASHRAF
BENGALURU, 2 JAN

In a joint operation, **Salar News** and Bengaluru CEN police exposed a fake loan scam that preyed on unsuspecting victims by using dummy apps to siphon money and harass them with threats.

To uncover the scam, a Salar News reporter downloaded and analysed a loan app.

The reporter ran the app on an emulator and found it to be a poorly designed dummy application. Upon initiating a loan request, the app required a valid phone number and personal documents. Despite the app's glitches, the reporter was in for a shock the next day when Rs 2,100 was credited to the phone number provided during the application. A quick investigation revealed that the money had been transferred from an account under the name Chavan Aluminium and Farnichar Kich. A week later, the reporter received a threat message demanding Rs 3,500 as loan repayment. The situation escalated when a woman claiming to be from the RupeKing loan recovery team called, threatening to leak the reporter's personal documents to their contact lists unless the repayment was made. The reporter requested a payment link from the recovery agent, who provided a gateway link. Instead of repaying, the reporter shared a spoofed location tracker disguised as proof of payment. The data from the spoofed link was handed over to Cyber Economics and Narcotics Halasuru Gate police. Police revealed that the scammers operated using proxy servers, which immediately disconnected when their network was accessed. Subsequently, the phone numbers used by the scammers were deactivated, though efforts to track them are ongoing. —*Salar News*

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PHOTO: PTI

Blaze engulfs textile factory in Bommasandra

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

A significant fire broke out at a textile factory located in the Bommasandra Industrial Area on the outskirts of the city on Thursday evening, leading to severe damage to property and heightening fears about possible casualties. Police and fire officials swiftly responded to the scene following reports of the blaze. However, by the time they arrived, the building was already engulfed in flames, resulting in the destruction of valuable materials inside. As of 8pm, there were no confirmed casualties, but officials remained uncertain about the possibility of anyone being trapped inside the facility.

According to sources, workers detected smoke coming from the factory around 5pm and promptly evacuated the site, which may have averted a major disaster.Efforts to bring the fire under control continued well into the evening, hindered by blocked access roads and thick smoke that impacted nearby businesses. Authorities indicated that investigations into the cause of the fire are ongoing, and operations may extend into Friday morning, as per an official statement.

—Salar News

50 bikes gutted in fire at Mahadevapura

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

At least fifty two wheelers were gutted in fire that broke out at a bike showroom near Mahadevapura here, police said on Thursday. The accident happened last night, allegedly due to an electric short circuit. Fire tenders were rushed to the spot and flames were doused. The accident took place while the showroom was closed, and it was only the local residents who noticed thick smoke billowing out from the building, according to officials. *—PTI*

Food delivery man dies as bike crashes into tree

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

A 21-year-old food delivery executive died after his scooter crashed into a roadside tree in the KG Halli traffic police limits in the early hours of Thursday. Police identified the deceased as Sumanj Manjhi, 28, a native of West Bengal. They said the accident took place around 2am when Manjhi, reportedly speeding on his scooter, lost control and crashed into the tree. Eyewitnesses and passers-by immediately rushed Manjhi to a nearby hospital where he succumbed to his injuries shortly after admission.The KG Halli traffic police have registered a case and launched an investigation to determine the exact circumstances of the accident *—Salar News*

Ambedkar supporters call for Mysuru bandh

MYSURU, 2 JAN

Members of the Dr BR Ambedkar Fans Horata Samithi, which comprises various Dalit organisations, have announced a Mysuru bandh on 7 January to protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent remarks about Dr BR Ambedkar in Parliament. At a press conference in Mysuru, Horata Samithi chief and former mayor Purushottam stated that the bandh will be observed from 6am to 4pm. He noted that numerous organisations and associations have shown their support for the bandh call. Purushottam urged traders, hotel establishments, auto rickshaw drivers, and educational institutions to join the protest by halting their services on that day. *—Salar News*

BJP to send contractor's suicide note to CM

Kharge & RaGa to get note too; BJP wants CM to remove Priyank from Cabinet

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

BJP on Thursday decided to send copies of a civil contractor's suicide note to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and senior Congress leaders, highlighting the name of Minister Priyank Kharge in it.

Addressing reporters here, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said the party will not remain idle till Priyank Kharge is removed from the cabinet.

"You cannot escape from this case, Priyank. Even if the entire cabinet is in your support, you cannot escape," he said.

He said, "We will also send the copies of the death note to Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi by post."

He demanded that Siddaramaiah remove Priyank from the Cabinet and warned of intensifying its agitation.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka alleged that the state government was unable to take action against Kharge.

BJP workers paste posters on a wall during a protest against Minister Priyank Kharge over the suicide of contractor Sachin Panchal *PHOTO: PTI*

"The government and Siddaramaiah are shivering..." Ashoka told reporters in response to a question on whether the government was hesitating from taking action against Priyank as he is the son of AICC President's son.

Recalling Kharge's campaign demanding former Minister KS Eshwarappa's resignation when BJP was in power over the death of a contractor, Ashoka told Priyank, "Please have a look at it and decide."

To a question on Priyank's statement that Eshwarappa was named in Patil's death note, the BJP leader said, "His (Kharge) name is also there. Who said it is not there?" Civil contractor Sachin Panchal died on 26 December by suicide by jumping before a moving train in Bidar district. In his suicide note, he accused Priyank's close aide Raju Kapanur of compelling him to take the drastic step. *—PTI*

Priyank flays BJP for blaming him

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge on Thursday slammed BJP leaders for blaming him for civil contractor Sachin Panchal's suicide, though he was nowhere connected.

The Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister said there was no comparison between the suicides of Panchal and Santosh Patil.

Patil died by suicide in a hotel room in Udupi – during the previous BJP government – on April 12, 2022."Santosh Patil had categorically mentioned about the then Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister KS Eshwarappa of the BJP government, whereas in Panchal case, my name is nowhere mentioned in the suicide note. Still the BJP is raising a non-issue. Did the BJP pay compensation to Patil's kins or give job to his family members?" Kharge asked.The minister said the BJP was yet to expel from party former minister Munirathna, who is accused in cases of rape and making caste remarks. It raises doubt about the BJP following their own slogan of 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (save daughters and educate girl children), he said.Regarding the BJP's proposed agitation in Kharge's home district of Kalaburagi on 4 January, he said there are many skeletons in BJP's closets, and the party should first put their own house in order before commenting on others.

Civil contractor Sachin Panchal died by suicide on 26 December by lying before a moving train in Bidar district. In his suicide note, he wrote he was receiving threats that he would be killed unless he paid Rs 1 crore to Priyank close aide Raju Kapanur. *—PTI*

DALIT BODY BACKS PRIYANK

MYSURU, 2 JAN

Activists of Karnataka Dalith Sangarsha Samithi (KDSS) district unit organised a protest against the BJP in Mysuru on Thursday for levelling "fake allegations" against Priyank Kharge.

The protesters raised slogans against State BJP chief BY Vijayendra, legislative council floor leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy and BJP MLC Ravikumar for attacking "an honest Dalit minister", who has been handling his portfolio effectively.

Even in the death note left by contractor Sachin Panchal, there is no mention of Kharge's name. However, he mentioned Raju Kapanur, who identified with BJP leaders, he said, adding that the state government conducted a CID probe to verify the truth, they said. The protesters also condemned BJP leaders for seeking the resignation of Priyank and warned of spreading the stir across the State. *—Salar News*

Road named after CM: Historian seeks legal action

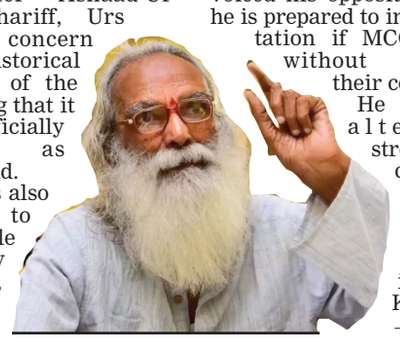
MYSURU, 2 JAN

Historian Professor PV Nanjaraj Urs has raised strong objections to the proposal to rename a stretch of KRS Road after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, declaring intentions to launch a legal challenge against the plan. Speaking to the media following a meeting with Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) Commissioner Ashaad-Ur-Rahman Shariff, Urs expressed concern over the historical significance of the road, arguing that it is already officially designated as Princess Road.

Urs, who is also connected to the erstwhile royal family of Mysuru, asserted, "I have spoken to District In-charge Minister Mahadevappa and Commissioner Shariff. I plan to discuss this with Siddaramaiah as well, and I remain hopeful that he will not endorse it."

He is the author of "Mysooru Noorinnooru Varshagala Hinde," chronicling the history of the Yadu dynasty, which ruled the region. Activist Snehamayi Krishna, voiced his opposition, stating he is prepared to initiate a agitation if MCC proceeds without addressing their concerns.

He urged for alternative stretches to be considered for renaming, insisting on preserving the integrity of KRS Road. *—Salar News*



BJP MLC opposes road's renaming

The BJP's Legislative Councillor H Vishwanath on Thursday opposed the Mysuru City Corporation's (MCC) move to rename a stretch of KRS Road as Siddaramaiah Arogya Marga, saying that there are records to prove the stretch was named Princess Road. Vishwanath appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his supporters to drop the plans to rename the stretch and put an end to this row. He said people have already displayed their respect to the CM by elevating him to high positions in his 40 years of political career. Vishwanath also flayed KPCC spokesperson M Lakshmana for saying that MP Yaduveer Wadiyar is an adopted son of Mysore Royal Family. As there was curse on the royal family from time immemorial, it adopted a son in continuation of tradition. Congress leaders must stop stooping to such levels of attacking the MP, he said.The BJP leader said the Congress bankrupted the state, halting all development works. He said the CM must release a white paper on the state's financial status. Siddaramaiah failed to initiate action against tainted IAS officer Rohini Sindhuri and IPS Officer Roopa, he said. *—Salar News*

Cabinet may discuss caste census in next meet: Patil

HASSAN, 2 JAN

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil on Thursday indicated the possibility of the Socio-Economic and Education Survey report, popularly known as the "caste census," being placed before the Cabinet at its next meeting.

The Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes, under its then Chairman K Jayaprakash Hegde, submitted the report to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 29 February 29 last year.

Responding to a question on the possibility of the state cabinet discussing the caste census report in its next meeting, Patil said, "Quite possible."

The caste census report was submitted to Siddaramaiah amid objections from certain sections of society and within the ruling Congress.

Karnataka's two dominant communities–Vokkaligas and Lingayats–have expressed reservations about the survey, calling it "unscientific," and have demanded that it be rejected and a fresh survey conducted. *—PTI*

Don't rely on freebies: Joshi

MANGALURU, 2 JAN

Union Minister for Renewable Energy Prahlad Joshi on Thursday urged people not to be dependent on the governments for freebies and instead, produce their own solar power.

Joshi said this at a meeting with power consumers, electricity supply company (ESCOM) officials and people's representatives to discuss the Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana in Mangaluru on Thursday. "I will not comment on what the motives were behind the distribution of free power generated using environmentally harmful core-sector material. But sustainability in the power sector is going to be the key to a safer future for the country," said Joshi. *—PTI*

While Shubha and the driver drowned, Manvith managed to climb onto the bonnet of the SUV and cried for help *PHOTO: SALAR*

2 DROWN AFTER SUV PLUNGES INTO LAKE

MYSURU, 2 JAN

Two Mysuru residents died while another person escaped after their vehicle plunged into a lake at Kuntur in Kollegal taluk of Chamarajanagar district. They were headed to MM Hills when the driver of the SUV lost control of the vehicle, police said.

Police identified the deceased as driver Urjith, 25, and Shubha, 21, a resident of of Kuderu village in Chamarajanagar taluk who was working as a telemarketing executive in Mysuru.

While Shubha and the driver drowned, Manvith managed to climb onto the bonnet of the SUV and cried for help, police said. Upon receiving information, police and personnel from the fire station rushed to the spot and rescued the Manvith, they said.

Police have handed over the bodies to relatives after conducting the post-mortem examination. Superintendent of Police BT Kavitha and Kollegal DySP Dharmendra visited the accident spot. Mamballi Agara Police have registered a case and started an investigation. *—Salar News*

'HEALTH MINISTER MUST QUIT'

Opposition seeks probe into maternal deaths

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Slamming the Congress government in Karnataka over maternal deaths in the state, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka on Thursday demanded a judicial probe into the matter and called for the resignation of Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao.

Also expressing concern over the state of government hospitals and accusing the administration of "bowing" to the pressure of drug mafia, he said the maternal deaths are in a way "government-sponsored murder".

The Leader of Opposition's comments come as the state BJP's Mahila Morcha has launched daily protests in five districts from Thursday, demanding the resignation of Health Minister Gundu Rao and Minister for Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar. They have accused the ministers of failure to prevent the deaths of new mothers in the state.

"After the Siddaramaiah-led government came to power in Karnataka, maternal deaths at government hospitals have increased, with most of them occurring in the 25–30 age group. This trend continues unabated," Ashoka said.

Noting that he had raised the issue in the assembly during the recent Belagavi legislature session and pointed out the government's mistakes with supporting documents, he said, "The government is directly responsible for the maternal deaths. This is, in a way, government-sponsored murder. Substandard drugs were supplied, and it is clear that the government has bowed down to the drug mafia." *—PTI*

After the Siddaramaiah-led government came to power in Karnataka, maternal deaths at government hospitals have increased, with most of them occurring in the 25–30 age group. This trend continues unabated

-R Ashoka, BJP leader

HC STALLS CASE AGAINST KOLLA HEMA

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

The High Court of Karnataka has temporarily stayed proceedings against Telugu actor Kolla Hema in a case of alleged drug use at a rave party near Electronics City in May 2024.

Justice Hemant Chandangoudar issued the interim stay following a petition filed by Hema, 52, challenging the charge sheet filed under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. The stay will remain in effect until the court resumes hearing the case after four weeks. Hema's counsel argued that the charges under Section 27(b) of the NDPS Act — pertaining to the consumption of narcotic substances — were based solely on the confession of a co-accused. There was no independent evidence to confirm that Hema had consumed any drugs. *—PTI*

Man clicks pics on Metro, woman calls cops on him

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

- A police spokesperson stated on Thursday that Mahesh's phone did not contain any objectionable images

A man has been taken into custody following accusations from a woman who claimed he was photographing female passengers aboard a moving metro train in Bengaluru.

The incident, which occurred on 25 November, was reported to Jayanagar police. The accused, Mahesh, an Ayurvedic practitioner, was confronted by the complainant, a tech professional, during the journey between Majestic and JP Nagar. She alleged that he used his mobile phone to capture images of women, asserting that her face was visible in one of the photos, which she requested be deleted.

The woman promptly alerted police via the emergency number 112, leading to both parties being taken to the Jayanagar police station. A police spokesperson stated on Thursday that Mahesh's phone did not contain any objectionable images; however, the woman insisted on the photo's deletion. A non-cognisable report (NCR) has been filed. Despite unverified online claims suggesting Mahesh had previously stalked and photographed multiple women, police have found no evidence to support these allegations. *—Salar News*

BELAGAVI HORROR

Man tries to rape daughter, wife chops him up

BELAGAVI, 2 JAN

A 30-year-old woman in Belagavi murdered her 59-year-old husband after he allegedly attempted to rape their daughter after she refused to sleep with him. The woman later chopped the body into two pieces and threw it to a nearby agriculture field.

According to Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled, Savitri Itnal killed her husband, Srimanth Itnal, by bludgeoning him to death with a large stone while he was asleep in an intoxicated state. The incident occurred on Wednesday night at Umrani village in Chikkodi.

The woman confessed that her husband was an abusive alcoholic who frequently demanded money and forced her into prostitution *PHOTO: PTI*

Savitri confessed to the police that her husband was an abusive alcoholic who frequently demanded money and forced her into prostitution. When she refused to sleep with him, he reportedly turned his attention to their daughter. To dispose of the body, Savitri dismembered her husband, placing the body parts in plastic drums. She then transported the drums to a nearby agricultural field and disposed of them. The drums containing the body parts were later recovered from an open well. Savitri also disposed of evidence, including the murder weapon, bloodstained bedding, and her own clothes, in an attempt to cover her tracks. The Chikkodi police are currently investigating the gruesome crime. *—Salar News*

India announces $5,00,000 for quake-hit Vanuatu

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

India on Thursday announced assistance of USD 500,000 to the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu to help it deal with destruction caused by a 7.4 magnitude earthquake last month. New Delhi conveyed to Vanuatu its readiness to extend all possible support to people of the country in this time of "difficulty". The earthquake struck near Vanuatu's coast in the South Pacific Ocean on December 17 causing major destruction and loss of lives. "As a close friend and partner under the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation and as a gesture of solidarity with the friendly people of Vanuatu, India extends relief assistance of USD 5,00,000 to support relief," the MEA said. *—PTI*

B'desh releases 95 Indian fishermen, crew members

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The reciprocal repatriation of 95 Indian fishermen/crew detained in Bangladesh and 90 Bangladeshi fishermen or crew detained in India began on Thursday. The process is expected to be completed on 5 January. According to a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs, Bangladesh handed over 95 Indian fishermen to the Bangladesh Coast Guard earlier. These individuals will be transferred to the Indian Coast Guard during a coordinated operation at sea. Two Bangladeshi fishing vessels detained in India and six Indian fishing boats detained in Bangladesh will also be exchanged. Bangladesh detained a total of 95 Indian fishermen and six fishing boats inside Bangladesh Waters during October and November 2024. *—Agencies*

Give probe reports on Ansari's death to son: SC to UP

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh authorities to provide medical and magisterial inquiry reports on the death of jailed gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari on 28, March 2024. A bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and SVN Bhatti took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Umar Ansari. Umar said the medical and the judicial inquiry reports pertaining to his father's death were not furnished by the state government. Ansari, 63, a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar, allegedly died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh. He was in jail since 2005, with over 60 criminal cases pending against him, and was convicted in the murder case of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai. *—PTI*

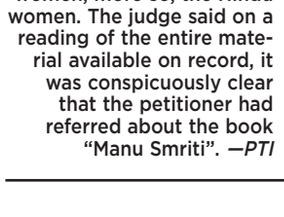


PHOTO: PTI

HC quashes 'hate speech' complaint against VCK leader

CHENNAI, 2 JAN

The Madras High Court has quashed a private complaint filed against VCK leader Thol Thirumavalavan for his alleged hate speech against Indian women, more particularly Hindu women in an online conference held in 2020. Justice P Velmurugan quashed the complaint in a recent order while allowing a petition filed by Thirumavalavan, also a Lok Sabha MP. In his order, the judge said on a reading of the complaint, it was seen that the main allegation made by the respondent-de facto complainant was that the speech rendered by the petitioner was telecast on a Youtube channel, which amounts to being a hate speech against the Indian women, more so, the Hindu women. The judge said on a reading of the entire material available on record, it was conspicuously clear that the petitioner had referred about the book "Manu Smriti". *—PTI*

BSF allowing infiltrators to enter India: Mamata

BJP calls Didi's statement on BSF 'ultimate case of delusion'

KOLKATA, 2 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the Border Security Force (BSF) of letting infiltrators from Bangladesh enter India and charged the BSF with trying to destabilise the state.

Stating that she could sense a "blueprint of the central government behind this attitude of the BSF", Banerjee also accused a section of district magistrates and SPs of helping the border guards in their illegal act.

"Border security is not our responsibility and BSF looks after this. Visa is not our matter but that of the central government. We used to get the list of who were taking flights to come here, but now it has been stopped. So, we do not know who all are coming," she said.

She asked Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar to find out where the infiltrators are staying and said she would write a strongly-worded letter regarding this to the Centre.

TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee claimed that it was a conspiracy to blame the TMC for the infiltration issue PHOTO: FB

The Trinamool Congress supremo claimed that it was a conspiracy to blame the TMC for the infiltration issue.

Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee also criticised the BJP-led central government for allegedly remaining silent on atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh, questioning the Centre's "inadequate" diplomatic response to the crisis and accused the BSF of aiding infiltrators to destabilise West Bengal.

Raising concerns over the Centre's response to the crisis, Banerjee alleged, "Why are the prime minister, foreign minister, defence minister, and the union home minister silent on the situation in Bangladesh? The BJP government talks about valour and 'Parakram' but has not responded adequately to the atrocities on minorities in the neighbouring country."

Reacting to the statements, Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar said she has reached the "ultimate level of delusion". Reacting sharply, Majumdar wrote on X: "The failed chief minister of the state, Mamata Banerjee has reached the ultimate level of delusion." "Despite not providing land to set up outposts for border surveillance, she used to blame the Border Security Force for illegal infiltration. But now, crossing all limits of accusations, she has started blaming her own administration's officials," he added. *—PTI*

The Left party also accused the Biren Singh government of showing no willingness to take political parties into confidence or involve them in finding a comprehensive political solution PHOTO: ANI

Apology is not enough: CPI demands Biren's resignation

IMPHAL, 2 JAN

The CPI on Thursday said the apology tendered by Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh over the ethnic strife in the northeastern state was not enough and demanded his resignation.

The crisis in Manipur highlights the "absolute breakdown of governance", the Left party alleged.

"The state government has failed to maintain law and order, protect citizens and ensure justice, leading to widespread suffering and insecurity. The apology expressed by Chief Minister N Biren Singh is an admission of the gravity of the crisis and the complete failure of the state government to address the issues and challenges of the people in the state," the CPI said in a statement.

The party also alleged that the state government had "failed to take meaningful steps towards reconciliation".

"There have been no concrete measures to foster dialogue between communities or heal the deep social wounds inflicted by the ongoing crisis," the party statement said.

The Left party also accused the Biren Singh government of showing "no willingness" to take political parties into confidence or involve them in finding a comprehensive political solution. "Apology is not enough, Biren Singh must resign," it said.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continued refusal to visit Manipur and directly address the crisis demonstrates his lack of concern for the people of the state. This failure of the union government has further eroded trust and exacerbated the situation," the CPI said. *—PTI*

Name college after Manmohan, not Savarkar: NSUI to PM

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

The Congress-affiliated National Students' Union of India (NSUI) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to name Delhi University's upcoming college after former prime minister Manmohan Singh, instead of Veer Savarkar.

Modi is set to lay the foundation stone for Veer Savarkar College in Najafgarh on Friday.

The institution was approved by Delhi University's Executive Council, its highest decision-making body, in 2021.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, NSUI national president Varun Choudhary highlighted Singh's contributions to education and governance, requesting that the college honour his legacy.

Singh, who passed away last month, was a veteran leader of the UPA government. NSUI also called for including Singh's life journey, from a post-Partition student to a global icon, in academic curricula. They emphasised that Singh's legacy as a scholar, economist and public servant symbolised resilience, merit and dedication to public welfare. *—PTI*

BPSE: PK on hunger strike, demands exam cancellation

PATNA, 2 JAN

Upping the ante, Jan Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor on Thursday began a fast unto death to press the demand for cancellation of an examination recently held by Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC).

Kishor made the announcement at the historic Gandhi Maidan in the state capital, three days after giving a "48-hour ultimatum" to the Nitish Kumar government for acting on the demand, raised by aggrieved candidates.

The administration, however, said the hunger strike at Gandhi Maidan is illegal as it is not the designated site for holding protests.

Prashant Kishor said that the demands he is making were just a few of the things on which he expected the government to act PHOTO: PTI

"My primary demand, of course, is cancellation of the exam held on 13 December and conducting a fresh test. I have also heard allegations that posts to be filled by the exam were virtually put on sale. Such corrupt officials must be identified and brought to justice", said Kishor. The venue was barely a couple of kilometres from Gardani Bagh where the aggrieved aspirants have been holding a round-the-clock sit-in for nearly two weeks.

The 47-year-old former poll strategist, who hopes his fledgling party to make a big impact in assembly polls due in less than a year, also made it clear that the demands he is making were just a few of the things on which he expected the government to act. *—PTI*

Omar hopes for temporary UT status, urges for J&K statehood

SRINAGAR, 2 JAN

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday expressed hope that Jammu and Kashmir's Union Territory status is a temporary phase and that the central government fulfils its promise of restoring its statehood.

"There is no pressure from the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi), Home Minister (Amit Shah) or the Raj Bhawan on us to change our ideology," he said, Abdullah said in a free-wheeling interaction with mediapersons at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC) here.

"Dual centres of power are not to anyone's advantage. If dual centres were effective tools of governance, you would see it everywhere," Abdullah said when asked about the hybrid model of governance in Jammu and Kashmir. He said while there have been "differences of opinion on some issues", there was no confrontation with the Raj Bhavan.

"Systems work better when there is single centre of command. For a UT, the dual centres of command are inbuilt. There have been differences of opinion on some issues, but not on the scale at which it is being speculated," he said.

Abdullah said the business rules for the government would be framed after proper consultations and then sent to Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

He also said that he was not the one to tell people to not go to the Raj Bhavan. "I would say people should go to wherever they can get their issues resolved – be it in the Raj Bhavan, the local MLAs or the officers," he said. *—PTI*

'OUR DOORS ARE OPEN'

Nitish gives cryptic reply to Lalu's call to return to INDIA

PATNA, 2 JAN

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday came up with a cryptic response to RJD president Lalu Prasad's offer to take him back to the INDIA bloc.

Prasad had said, "Our doors are open (for Nitish). He should also unbolt his gates. This would facilitate movement of people from both sides."

"What are you saying?" was all the JD(U) chief's response to journalists who asked him about Prasad's offer.

Kumar had aligned twice with the RJD, a constituent of the INDIA bloc, in the last one decade.

Prasad's son and heir apparent Tejaswi Yadav, however, sought to downplay the remarks made by his father. In an interview to a local news channel, he said the RJD supremo merely tried to satisfy the curiosity of the media.

The remark, coming in the backdrop of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's stance on projecting the JD(U) chief as NDA's face in the assembly polls due in less than a year, triggered speculations in the media.

Kumar was approached with queries by journalists at Raj Bhavan, where he attended the swearing-in ceremony of Arif Mohammad Khan as the new Bihar governor.

PHOTO: PTI

- When Kumar was asked whether his government would be able to complete its term, Khan intervened and said, "This is not the occasion for a question of this type. Today is a happy day. Let us only talk about good things"

When Kumar was asked whether his government would be able to complete its term, Khan intervened and said, "This is not the occasion for a question of this type. Today is a happy day. Let us only talk about good things."

Yadav, who on Wednesday said the new year would see the "departure" of the NDA government under Nitish Kumar, said, "I have already made my stand clear". *—PTI*

Modi govt won't last 2 years: Raut

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said he is doubtful whether the Central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi will survive even till 2026.

If the third Modi government fails to complete its five-year term in office, it would also trigger a political change in Maharashtra and other states, he said.

Raut also dismissed speculation that some Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders might jump the ship following the party's poor show in the November 2024 Maharashtra assembly polls. *—PTI*

'Centre to implement revoked farm laws through backdoor'

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said the BJP would be responsible "if something happens" to the protesting farmers in Punjab who are on an indefinite fast over a set of demands, including a legal guarantee on MSP.

Kejriwal, in a post on X, also claimed that the Centre is preparing to implement the now-revoked three farm laws "through the backdoor" by calling it a "policy". He said copies of the new "policy" have been sent to all states for their views on it.

The AAP-led Punjab government has termed the newly announced draft policy on 'National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing' as an attempt to backdoor entry to the three central agri laws passed in 2020.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi lashed out at BJP, saying the party should ask Prime Minister Narendra Modi to hold talks with the farmers sitting on fast unto death in Punjab instead of giving sermons.

Responding to a letter written to her by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, she said the condition of farmers was never as bad as it is under the BJP regime.

"The BJP talking about the farmers is like Dawood Ibrahim sermonising about non-violence," Atishi said in her letter asking the BJP to stop politics over the farmers. Meanwhile, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan accused the Delhi government of depriving farmers of benefits under central schemes and urged Chief Minister Atishi to keep political differences aside in matters of farmer welfare. *—PTI*

'NEGLECT OF WOMEN'S ISSUES'

Anna University rape case is being politicised: Madras High Court fumes

CHENNAI, 2 JAN

The Madras High Court remarked that the alleged sexual assault case at Anna University is "being politicised," emphasising a lack of genuine focus on women's safety. The observation came during a hearing where Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) raised concerns about police denying permission for a planned protest in Chennai over the incident.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) formed a two-member fact-finding team, including retired IPS officer Praveen Dixit, to investigate. Over two days, the committee visited the university, met the victim and her family, engaged with campus authorities, NGOs, and assessed security measures. In a post on X, the NCW stated: "To ensure accountability, the NCW assessed security at Anna University, met the Special Investigation Team (SIT), and engaged stakeholders... A detailed report with actionable recommendations was prepared."

The incident occurred on 23 December when a 19-year-old engineering student was allegedly sexually assaulted on campus PHOTO: PTI

The incident occurred on 23 December when a 19-year-old engineering student was allegedly sexually assaulted on campus. The victim reported that the attacker also assaulted her male friend before dragging her into nearby shrubs to commit the crime.

The accused, Gnanasekaran, a roadside biryani vendor with a lengthy criminal record, was arrested shortly after the complaint was filed. In response to widespread outrage, the Madras High Court ordered the formation of a SIT comprising three senior IPS officers to handle the probe.

The case has sparked significant public and political debate, with calls for stronger safety measures and swift justice for the victim. *—Agencies*

Rajasthan teen out to use toilet gangraped

JAIPUR, 2 JAN

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and gangraped by three men after she stepped out of her house to use the toilet in Rajasthan's Deeg district, police said on Thursday. According to the complaint lodged at Kaman police station the girl was abducted by three neighbours, armed with a gun, on 29 December. The accused reportedly assaulted her in a mustard field, recorded obscene videos and threatened to circulate the clips on social media if she disclosed the incident, Kaman police station in-charge Manish Sharma said. Efforts are underway to locate the accused. *—PTI*

Metal fragment found on railway track in UP

SAHARANPUR, 2 JAN

A major mishap was averted when a large fragment of a metal was found lying on the railway track near Tapri on the Haridwar railway line in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district, officials said on Thursday. The railways has started a detailed probe into the matter that took place in the early hours of Tuesday, they said. The railway authorities, along with teams from the Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (RPF), promptly arrived at the scene and the train traffic was temporarily halted to remove the obstruction, ensuring the smooth resumption of railway services. "Around 1 am on Tuesday, we received information. Train number 14089, Anand Vihar-Kotdwar Express, was halted to ensure passengers safety. "Saharanpur Station Superintendent Sunil Kumar said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

3 dead in J&K guest house due to 'asphyxiation'

BHADERWAH/JAMMU, 2 JAN

Three people were found dead under suspicious circumstances in a guest house in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, officials said. A charcoal heater was found in the room and the trio could have died due to asphyxiation, they said. According to police, a man informed them that his sibling, who had gone to Bhaderwah, was not responding to calls. Police tracked the location of his brother's mobile phone late Wednesday night and dispatched a team, they said. The team traced the vehicle of the complainant's brother and found that they had booked a room at the Royal Inn guest house in Bhaderwah, the officials added. The deceased have been identified as Mukesh Kumar, Ashutosh and Sunny Choudhary, all residents of Jammu. *—PTI*

Man on local train dies after head hits pole on the track

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

A 24-year-old man standing on the footboard of a moving local train died on Wednesday night after his head hit a pole along the railway track near Wadala station in Mumbai, police said. The deceased, Mohan Gholap, was returning to his home in Chembur. He boarded the train at Cotton Green station on the Harbour line. "Gholap, accompanied by his friend, was standing on the footboard of the train when his head hit a pole along the tracks after crossing the Wadala bridge," a Government Railway Police official said. Passengers and his friend immediately pulled the emergency chain. GRP personnel who arrived at the spot found Gholap had sustained severe head injuries. He was declared dead on the spot. Gholap, was employed at Indigo Press in Cotton Green. *—PTI*

Groundwater nitrate levels high in 440 districts: Report

Samples from Karnataka, Rajasthan had 40% more nitrate

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

High nitrate levels have been found in groundwater of 440 districts across India, with 20 per cent of the samples collected exceeding the permissible nitrate concentration, the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has said in a report.

Nitrate contamination is a significant environmental and health concern, particularly in agricultural regions using nitrogen-based fertilisers and animal waste.

The "Annual Groundwater Quality Report – 2024" also revealed that 9.04 per cent of samples had fluoride levels above the safe limit, while 3.55 per cent showed arsenic contamination.

A total of 15,259 monitoring locations were chosen nationwide to check groundwater quality in May 2023. Of these, 25 percent of wells (the most at risk per BIS 10500) were studied in detail. Groundwater was sampled at 4,982 trend stations before and after the monsoon.

The report found that 20 per cent of water samples exceeded the nitrate limit of 45mg/l, the threshold set by the World Health Organisation and Bureau of Indian Standards for drinking water.

Rajasthan, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had over 40 per cent of samples above the limit while there was high contamination in samples from Maharashtra at 35.74 per cent, Telangana at 27.48 per cent, Andhra Pradesh at 23.5 per cent and Madhya Pradesh at 22.58 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Jharkhand and Bihar reported lower percentages. In Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, all samples were found within safe limits.

High nitrate levels can cause health issues like blue baby syndrome in infants and are unsafe for drinking. *—PTI*

High nitrate levels can cause health issues like blue baby syndrome

PHOTO: PTI

5% Indian women underwent hysterectomy: Report

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

About five per cent of women in India have undergone hysterectomy, a surgical removal of the uterus, with heavy menstrual bleeding being the most common condition among those who underwent the procedure, according to an analysis of data collected during 2015-16.

Researchers from the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, and the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, analysed the data of over 4.5 lakh rural and urban women, aged 25-49 years, gathered during the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey.

The study published in Journal of Medical Evidence

PHOTO: Pixabay

revealed that "the prevalence of hysterectomy among women aged 25-49 years was 4.8 per cent, which indicates that about five in every 100 Indian women aged 25-49 years have undergone a hysterectomy."

It also found that women working in agriculture were 32 per cent more likely to undergo the surgical procedure compared to women in other occupations.

Further, the authors found higher hysterectomy rates in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Bihar.

They added that "these states have been the focus of debate for needless hysterectomies in India,", especially among low-income women, and high levels of health insurance coverage among women of reproductive age in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Previous studies have suggested that factors such as menstrual taboos, ignorance of gynecological issues, and unhygienic sexual and reproductive health practices may explain why these states record higher rates of hysterectomy, the authors said. *—PTI*

ED raids in Bengal over ₹1,000 crore fraud in TN

KOLKATA, 2 JAN

Sleuths of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) started conducting raids at eight locations across West Bengal on Thursday in connection with its probe into cyber frauds involving over Rs 1,000 crore in Tamil Nadu, a senior officer said. Raids are underway simultaneously at five places in Park Street, Salt Lake, and Baguihati areas in Kolkata and in three other locations in districts, he said.

During the raid in Salt Lake area, the ED sleuths detained a person for questioning, the officer said.

"Our officers are now conducting raids at a flat in a high-end residential complex in Baguihati," he told PTI. *—PTI*

Police officials investigating at the beer shop

PHOTO: PTI

Beer shop brawl kills 2 in UP, sparks protest

BALLIA, 2 JAN

Two young men were killed with sharp-edged weapons at a beer shop in a village near the Bihar border in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia on the first night of the New Year, officials said on Thursday.

The incident triggered protests by the families and villagers, who briefly blocked the national highway, demanding justice.

Police said Prashant Gupta, 23, and Golu Verma, 24, were caught in a brawl at a beer shop in Kotwa Narayanpur village on Wednesday night. During the fight, they were attacked with sharp weapons, including an axe, killing them on the spot.

Outraged by the murders, the victims' families and villagers placed the bodies on the national highway, blocking the Ghazipur–Bharauli road and leading to long queues of vehicles on both sides of the road.

Senior police officials, including Superintendent of Police (SP) Omvir Singh, arrived at the scene and pacified the protesters after discussions, leading to the roadblock being cleared late at night.

"The police have taken both bodies into custody and sent them for postmortem after completing necessary legal formalities. Based on complaints from the families, an FIR has been registered against four named individuals under relevant sections of the law," SP Omvir Singh said. *—PTI*

Father-son kill neighbour, takes head to cops

NASHIK, 2 JAN

A man along with his son allegedly hacked their neighbour to death in Maharashtra's Nashik district and later went to local police with the victim's severed head to surrender, an official said on Thursday.

The incident took place on Wednesday morning in Nanashi village of Dindori taluka, following which the police have arrested the accused man and detained his son.

Suresh Boke, 40 and his son killed their neighbour Gulab Ramchandra Waghmare, 35, with an axe and a sickle. After local people came to know about the incident, they damaged the house of the accused and set their car on fire, the official said.

Along with the local police, personnel of the nearby police stations as well as the State Reserve Police Force were deployed in the village to maintain law and order.

"There was a longstanding dispute. They filed complaints against each other on 31 December. *—PTI*

EXAM REFORMS

Centre to heed expert views on NEET-UG

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

PHOTO: X

The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that it would be implementing all corrective measures suggested by its seven-member expert panel on exam reforms after reviewing the National Testing Agency's functioning in holding NEET-UG last year.

The top court on 2 August refused to annul the controversy-ridden NEET-UG 2024, saying there was no sufficient material on record to indicate a systemic leak or malpractice compromising the integrity of the examination.

It had also expanded the remit of the seven-member expert panel, headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation chief K Radhakrishnan, to review the functioning of the National Testing Agency and recommend exam reforms to make the NEET-UG (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test Undergraduate), transparent and free from malpractices.

On Thursday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, apprised a bench comprising justices PS Narasimha and Manoj Misra that the Centre-appointed committee has filed its report and the government will be implementing all the recommendations.

"We are going to implement all the recommendations and it (matter) can be listed after six months," the law officer said.

"The matter is adjourned for three months. List this special leave petition in the month of April," the bench said.

The entire report has not been placed on the records as it also contained some details regarding issues like printing of questions. *—PTI*

SC to hear Owaisi on Worship Law

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine a plea of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi seeking the effective implementation of the 1991 Places of Worship Law, which asks to maintain the religious character of a place as it existed on 15 August, 1947.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar ordered Owaisi's fresh plea to be tagged with the pending cases on the issue, and all matters, along with his plea, would be heard on 17 February.

At the outset, advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for the AIMIM president, said the court is seized of various pleas on the issue and the fresh one may be tagged with them as well.

"We will tag this," said the CJI.

Owaisi filed the plea on 17 December, 2024 through advocate Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi, seeking a direction to the Centre to ensure effective implementation of the law. *—PTI*

IIT-Guwahati makes injectable hydrogel for breast cancer

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, have developed an advanced injectable hydrogel for localised cancer treatment with significantly less side effects typically associated with conventional cancer treatments, according to officials.

The research conducted in collaboration with Bose Institute, Kolkata, has been published in "Materials Horizons", a journal of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Debapratim Das, Professor at IIT-Guwahati's Department of Chemistry, said current treatments such as chemotherapy and surgical interventions often have severe limitations.

"Surgical removal of tumours is sometimes not feasible, particularly for internal organs, while chemotherapy's systemic delivery often results in harmful side effects by affecting both cancerous and healthy cells. We have addressed it by designing a hydrogel that delivers drugs precisely to the tumour site, ensuring localised action," Das said.

Hydrogel for targeted drug delivery to tumours

PHOTO: PTI

Hydrogels are water-based three-dimensional polymer networks capable of absorbing and retaining fluids. Their structure mimics living tissues, making them suitable for biomedical applications. This hydrogel acts as a stable reservoir for anti-cancer drugs for controlled release, responding to specific conditions in the tumour micro-environment.

The hydrogel, composed of ultra-short peptides – biocompatible and biodegradable building blocks of proteins – is designed to remain insoluble in biological fluids. It responds to elevated glutathione levels, upon encountering high GSH levels, the hydrogel triggers a controlled drug release directly into the tumour, minimising its interaction with healthy tissues and reducing systemic side effects. *—PTI*

HOUSEWIVES, UNEMPLOYED TARGETED

Govt red flags 'pig butchering scam'

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

A new cyber fraud known as "pig butchering scam" or "investment scam" has emerged, targeting unemployed youths, housewives, students, and needy people who are made to lose large sums of money daily, according to the latest annual report of the Union Home Ministry.

The report said that cybercriminals have also been using Google services platforms to initiate these crimes.

"Google Advertisement platform provides a convenient facility for targeted advertisement from across the border. This scam, known as 'Pig Butchering Scam' or 'Investment Scam' is a global phenomenon and involves large-scale money laundering and even cyber slavery," it said.

PHOTO: X

The pig butchering scam, which is believed to have started in China in 2016, targets gullible individuals with whom cyber criminals build trust over time, ultimately convincing them to invest in cryptocurrency or some other lucrative scheme when their money is stolen. The analogy to pig butchering comes from the fattening of swine before their slaughter.

The home ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has partnered with Google to share the threat intelligence for urgent action periodically.

The cybercriminals are using sponsored Facebook to launch illegal lending applications in India, the report said.

WhatsApp remains the biggest social media platform that is possibly misused by cyber criminals in India, the report said.

The data published in the report on "cybercrime complaints where Big Tech platforms have been misused" shows that 14,746 complaints were related to WhatsApp, 7,651 against Telegram, 7152 against Instagram, 7,051 against Facebook, and 1135 against YouTube till March 2024. *—PTI*

Speedbreaker brings dead M'rashtra man back to life

KOLHAPUR, 2 JAN

For 65-year-old Pandurang Ulpe, a speed breaker proved to be a life-saver after an ambulance carrying his "body" from the hospital crossed it and his family noticed his fingers moving.

Earlier in the day on 16 December, Ulpe, a resident of Kasaba-Bawada in western Maharashtra's Kolhapur district, suffered a heart attack and was rushed to a private hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

An ambulance then began the journey with his "body" from the hospital to his home, where neighbours and relatives had gathered upon hearing the news of his demise, and were preparing for his last rites.

"When we were bringing his "body" home from the hospital, the ambulance passed over a speed breaker and we noticed that there was a movement in his fingers," his wife said.

Ulpe suffered heart attack and was later declared dead

He was then taken back to another hospital, where he remained for a fortnight, and underwent an angioplasty during the period.

Ulpe walked home from the hospital on Monday, a fortnight after, taking him back to life instead of the crematorium.

There has been no comment so far from the hospital which had declared him dead. *—PTI*

WINTER CARNIVAL

Artists perform Nati, a traditional folk dance from Himachal Pradesh, during the Winter Carnival, in Shimla, on Thursday. The word Nati refers to both the dance and the accompanying songs, which are often sung in local dialects. In 2016, Himachali Nati found a place in the Guinness World Records as one of the largest folk dance forms
PHOTO: PTI

B'desh-Pak thaw raises security concerns for India

Since the appointment of Muhammad Yunus as Bangladesh's interim leader in August after a student-led movement toppled Sheikh Hasina's government, Dhaka and Islamabad appear to be on the path to rapprochement.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Yunus agreed to deepen bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual interest after the two leaders met on the sidelines of a conference in Cairo in December.

The establishment of direct sea links, strained since the 1971 independence war when Bangladeshi nationalists broke away from West Pakistan, has marked a historic thawing of relations.

Bangladesh's interim government also removed previous restrictions that mandated physical inspections of cargo from Pakistan.

Some media reports claim that Pakistan will begin training the Bangladesh Army in February 2025, strengthening military ties between the two nations. Bangladesh will also reportedly join Pakistan in the "Aman 2025" joint naval exercises at Karachi port.

As Pakistan bolsters ties with Bangladesh, there are concerns about potential security threats in the region, with India closely monitoring developments that have the potential to reshape the power dynamics in South Asia.

Dhaka's ties with New Delhi have frayed since the ousting of Hasina, who had India's backing and now lives in exile there. Foreign policy experts and diplomats highlight that India must navigate a complex geopolitical environment marked by instability and security threats in its northeastern states.

While New Delhi closely monitors these developments, it is also ramping up security along its border with Bangladesh.

"There is no doubt that relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan have improved overall. This shift has security implications for India's northeastern states," Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, founder of the Mantraya Institute of Strategic Studies, said DW News.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammed Yunus agreed to deepen bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual interest in December
PHOTO: X/@CHIEFADVISERGOB

New Delhi has long been concerned about human trafficking, infiltration and militant insurgencies along the frontier, particularly as Bangladesh borders the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, which are prone to violent outbreaks.

"The important questions to consider are whether these strengthening ties are simply a reaction to India's tactical pressure, or if they are part of a larger design to destabilize India. If we assume the latter is true, can the present regime in Dhaka afford to pursue such a policy? The answer is no," said D'Souza.

According to D'Souza, it remains unclear whether Yunus' policies will resonate with Bangladesh's bureaucracy, for whom the interim government is a stop-gap arrangement.

"New Delhi needs to have its eyes and ears on the ground to craft policies to deal with the rapidly changing internal and external dynamics in the region," she added.

Ajay Bisaria, a former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, said that India's longstanding relation with its neighbors, particularly Bangladesh, focuses on fostering prosperity in exchange for addressing India's security concerns.

"This understanding is being challenged by the new regime in Dhaka," said Bisara, who added that Pakistan's efforts to rebuild security ties with Bangladesh and counter Indian influence could destabilize the regional security balance. "While India will closely monitor this evolving dynamic, it may also need to check Pakistan's growing influence in the eastern periphery through proactive military postures and security measures," Bisara noted.

Specifically, the new alliance between Pakistan and Bangladesh poses a significant threat to India's strategic interests, particularly to the Siliguri corridor, often referred to as the Chicken Neck.

The geopolitically sensitive passage connects northeastern Indian states to the rest of India through a narrow strip of Indian territory measuring 20-22 kilometers at its narrowest section.

India fears China might aim to establish its presence near the corridor under the guise of development work with Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, India has ramped up security along its border with Bangladesh, deploying technological solutions and conducting high-level Border Security Force inspections to address vulnerabilities and curb infiltration and smuggling along unfenced border areas. *—DW News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

IS inspires attacks by offshoots and lone wolves

The FBI says it recovered the stark black banner of the Islamic State extremist group from the truck that an American man from Texas smashed into New Year's partygoers in New Orleans' French Quarter Wednesday, killing 15 people.

The investigation is expected to look in part at any support or inspiration that driver Shamsud-Din Jabbar may have drawn from that violent Middle East-based group, or from any of at least 19 affiliated groups around the world.

President Joe Biden said Wednesday evening that the FBI had told him that "mere hours before the attack, (Jabbar) posted videos on social media indicating that he was inspired" by the Islamic State.

Routed from its self-proclaimed caliphate in Syria and Iraq by a US military-led coalition more than five years ago, the Islamic State has focused on seizing territory in the Middle East more than on staging massive al-Qaida-style attacks on the West.

But in its home territory the Islamic State has welcomed any chance to behead Americans and other foreigners who come within its reach. And it has had success, although abated in recent years, in inspiring people around the world who are drawn to its ideology to carry out ghastly attacks on innocent civilians.

Here's a look at the Islamic State, its current status, and some of the offshoot armed groups and so-called lone wolves that have killed under the Islamic State flag.

The Islamic State also is known as both IS and ISIS, or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

It began as a breakaway group from al-Qaida.

Under leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, IS had seized stunning amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria by 2014. Within territory under its control, it killed and otherwise abused members of other faiths and targeted fellow Sunni Muslims who strayed from its harsh interpretation of Islam.

By 2019, a US-led military intervention had driven Islamic State from the last inch of its territory. Al-Baghdadi killed himself, and two children near him, that same year, detonating an explosive vest as US forces closed in on him.

Currently, the central Islamic State group is a scattered and much weakened organization working to regain fighting strength and territory in Syria and Iraq. Experts warn that the group is reconstituting itself there.

And that ISIS flag? Typically, it's a stark black banner with white Arabic letters expressing a central creed of the Islamic faith. Countless Muslims around the world see the coercive violence of the group as a perversion of their religion.

Some experts argue the Islamic State is powerful today partly as a brand, inspiring both militant groups and individuals in attacks that the group itself may have no real role in.

The Islamic State's ruthless credo and military successes have helped spur affiliated groups in Africa, Asia and Europe. It's a greatly decentralized alliance.

Many offshoots have carried out lethal attacks, such as a March 2024 attack blamed on an Afghanistan-based affiliate of the Islamic State that killed some 130 people at a Moscow theater.

The New Orleans rampage reflects the deadliest Islamic State-inspired attack on US soil in several years.

Other attacks over the last decade include a 2014 shooting rampage by a husband-and-wife team who killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California, and a 2016 massacre at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, by a gunman who fatally shot 49 people, pledged his allegiance on a 911 call to al-Baghdadi and raged against the "filthy ways of the West."

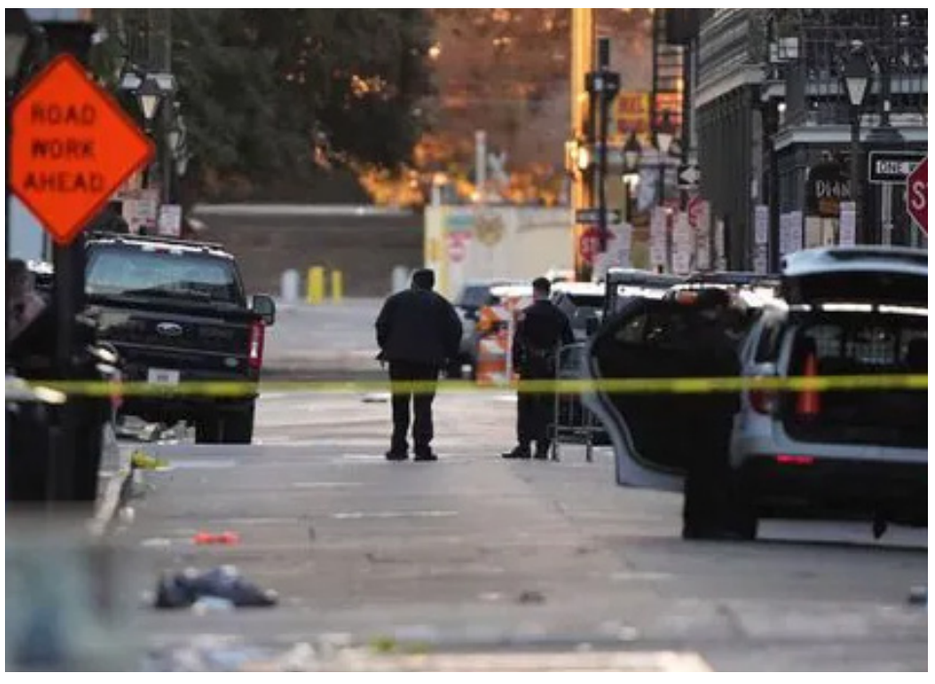
Those attacks coincided with an influx of thousands of Westerners — some of them Americans — who travelled to Syria in hopes of joining the so-called caliphate.

In the aftermath of those killings, the threat from radicalized followers of the group had appeared to wane in the US. Al-Baghdadi was killed in a 2019 US raid in Syria after he was chased into a tunnel with three of his children and set off a vest of explosives, Defense Department strikes have taken out other Islamic State members and the FBI has had significant success in disrupting plots before they come to fruition.

But over the last year, FBI officials have warned about a significantly elevated threat of international terrorism following Hamas' rampage in Israel in October 2023 and the resulting Israeli strikes in Gaza.

The SITE intelligence group reported IS supporters celebrating in online chat groups Wednesday.

"If it's a brother, he's a legend. Allahu Akbar," or "God is great," it quoted one as saying. *—PTI*



The New Orleans rampage reflects the deadliest Islamic State-inspired attack on US soil in several years
PHOTO: PTI

Bengaluru faces ₹1,800 crore loss due to cybercrimes in 2024

HAMEED ASHRAF

Cybercrime in India is evolving at an alarming rate, with fraudsters leveraging sophisticated technologies and exploiting human vulnerabilities. A close examination of recent cybercrimes in Bengaluru sheds light on the modus operandi of cybercriminals and the pressing need for enhanced preventive measures.

How cybercrime networks operate

Karnataka Crime Investigation Department (CID) recently unearthed a cybercrime network that uses Telegram to sell stolen bank account details. CID investigators found groups offering bank account details and mule accounts, at prices ranging between Rs 10,000 and Rs 25,000. Their target usually is rural and underprivileged people who are lured through government benefits or fake surveys. Fraudsters misuse emerging technologies like AI and blockchain. "They are double-edged swords," said Rajesh LY, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Bengaluru. "While they offer tools for securing digital ecosystems, they could also empower criminals with new methods of deception," he said.

Digital arrests and fear-based frauds

Cybercriminals instil fear through tactics like "digital arrests," posing as law enforcement or government officials. Victims are threatened with fabricated charges, such as involvement in terrorism or drug smuggling, and coerced into revealing bank details or making payments. Fraudsters also misuse Aadhaar-enabled Payment System by cloning biometrics and fabricating Aadhaar details.

On 7 December, a 65-year-old retired journalist encountered a "digital arrest" scam. The fraudster, posing as a Lucknow police officer, claimed the journalist's mobile number had been misused by hackers for terrorism-related activities. The imposter tried to intimidate the senior citizen into sharing personal details. However, the journalist, ended the call on time and reported the crime. In Bengaluru, digital arrests have surged dramatically, with City police reporting 403 cases in 2023, and 1,417 cases in 2024 to date.

Bengaluru lost Rs 1,800 crore in 2024

According to reports, cybercrime cost Bengaluru residents Rs 1,800 crore in 2024 till 30 November, marking a 16 per cent increase in financial losses compared to 2023.

Bengaluru saw over 50,000 cybercrime cases registered in the past seven years
PHOTO: AI

Despite efforts, only Rs 122 crore has been recovered. Rising trend of stock trading scams and phishing attacks exemplifies the scale and diversity of these crimes.

Challenges in combating cybercrime

Information Technology Act, 2000, provides a legal framework to address cybercrimes, but enforcement remains a challenge. In most cases, law enforcement agencies in Karnataka may not have the technical skills to collect, analyse and trace digital evidence. Fraudsters use advanced technologies such as encrypted communication, proxy servers and sophisticated phishing techniques, leaving traditional investigative methods ineffective. Despite efforts to equip Cybercrime Economics and Narcotics (CEN) units with tools like Software-Defined Radio for tracking criminals, the lack of trained personnel remains a hurdle.

Another roadblock is the network of cyber frauds, crossing state and national boundaries, a senior official from Karnataka Cybercrime Department told **Salar News.** "Obtaining digital evidence requires multiple legal permissions from different jurisdictions and tracking IP addresses and digital footprints often needs complex inter-agency coordination," he said.

According to National Crime Records Bureau, Bengaluru saw over 50,000 cybercrime cases registered in the past seven years, yet only 26 resulted in convictions. Over 700 social media accounts and groups have been shut down.

Report quickly, save yourself

Victims are unaware of basic cybersecurity practices . Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda has urged citizens to report crimes quickly and follow safety measures. He said the first 24-48 hours (Golden Hours) after discovering a cybercrime are crucial and quick reporting increases the chances of tracking digital evidence. "Victims should immediately file a detailed online or offline complaint while preserving all digital evidence including screenshots, chats, emails and transaction details, without tampering. The victim can then approach the nearest police station or call 1930 or 112 and report the incident," Dayananda said.

DSP Rajesh LY said users must avoid installing unverified apps on their mobile phones and refrain from clicking on suspicious URL links. *—Salar News*

Tesla Cybertruck explodes near Trump's hotel

Explosion killed the suspect inside the vehicle; firework mortars and fuel canisters found

LAS VEGAS, 2 JAN

A Tesla Cybertruck exploded and burst into flames near Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, killing a person inside the vehicle and injuring several others standing nearby, local officials said. Firework mortars and camp fuel canisters were found stuffed into the back of the Tesla Cybertruck sparking an intense investigation into possible terrorism.

The suspect in the Tesla Cybertruck explosion has been identified as a 37-year-old US Army veteran, Matthew Livelsberger, reports from US media said.

The FBI is investigating whether there is a link between the Las Vegas explosion and the New Orleans rampage in which a truck ran over a crowd before opening fire and killing 15 people.

Both vehicles involved in New Orleans and Las Vegas were rented through Turo, a car-renting company.

"Our number one goal is to ensure that we have the proper identification of the subject involved in this incident," said Jeremy Schwartz, acting special agent in charge for the FBI's Las Vegas office, "Following that, our second objective is to determine whether this was an act of terrorism or not."

Video presented at an afternoon news conference showed a tumble of charred fireworks mortars, cannisters and other explosive devices crowded into the back of the pickup. The truck bed walls were still intact because the blast shot straight up rather than to the sides.

Flames rise from a Tesla Cybertruck after it exploded near Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on Thursday
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Musk said that, "we have now confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself. All vehicle telemetry was positive at the time of the explosion."

Musk said that his entire term was probing the explosion, adding, "We've never seen anything like this." He has become a member of Trump's inner circle and attended a New Year's Eve party at the Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. *—PTI*

New Year's firework blast kills 3 in Honolulu

Emergency crews arrived to a chaotic and gruesome scene in a Honolulu neighbourhood after a large New Year's firework tipped over after being lit and ignited a fiery, shrapnel-studded blast that killed three people and injured more than 20 others, several of them critically.] Officials promised tougher penalties for illegal fireworks. *—PTI*

10 wounded in shooting in New York's Queens

A group of men fired at least 30 gunshots into a crowd gathered outside a nightclub in New York's Queens on New Year's Day, injuring 10 people, mainly teenagers. Police said three to four males were walking toward the venue and opened fire over 30 times in the direction of a group standing in line outside the event, striking multiple vehicles. *—PTI*

MAN BEHIND MONTENEGRO MASSACRE DIES BY SUICIDE

PODGORICA, 2 JAN

A gunman who fatally shot at least 12 people, including two children, in Montenegro has killed himself while surrounded by police, officials said Thursday.

At least four others were wounded in the shooting rampage in the western town of Cetinje on Wednesday that followed a bar brawl, officials said.

The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Aco Martinovic, killed the owner of the bar, the bar owner's children and his own family members, Interior Minister Danilo Saranovic said. Martinovic was at the bar throughout the day with other guests when the brawl erupted, Police Commissioner Lazar Scepanovic said. He said that Martinovic then went home, brought back a weapon and opened fire at around 5.30pm.

Montenegro is known for its gun culture and many people traditionally have weapons. *—PTI*

'IS-INSPIRED ARMY VETERAN BEHIND NEW ORLEANS SHOOTING'

NEW ORLEANS, 2 JAN

A US Army veteran who drove a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year's revellers in New Orleans, killing 15 people, had posted videos to social media hours before the carnage saying he was inspired by the Islamic State group and expressing a desire to kill, US president Joe Biden said.

The FBI said it was investigating early Wednesday's attack in which the driver steered around a police blockade and slammed into revellers before being shot dead by police as a terrorist act and did not believe he acted alone.

Investigators found guns and what appeared to be an improvised explosive device in the vehicle — which bore the flag of the Islamic State group — along with other explosive devices elsewhere in the city's famed French Quarter. FBI identified the driver as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, 42, and said it was working to determine any associations with terrorist organisations. *—PTI*

6 Jan Capitol riot probe panel leaders to be honoured

WASHINGTON DC, 2 JAN

US President Joe Biden is bestowing the second highest civilian medal on Liz Cheney and Bennie Thompson — the lawmakers who led the congressional investigation into the violent 6 January, 2021, US Capitol riot by US president elect Donald Trump's supporters, and who Trump has said should be jailed. Biden will award the Presidential Citizens Medal to 20 people in a ceremony on Thursday at the White House, including Americans who fought for marriage equality, a pioneer in treating wounded soldiers, and two of the president's long-time friends, former Sens Ted Kaufman, D-Del, and Chris Dodd, D-Conn. Biden last year honoured people who were involved in defending the Capitol from the rioters. *—PTI*

Pak cuts pension benefits for retired personnel

ISLAMABAD, 2 JAN

In a bid to alleviate its burgeoning pension liabilities, which have surpassed Rs 1 trillion, the Pakistan government has implemented substantial reductions in pension benefits for retired civil and military personnel. The Ministry of Finance announced changes via three notifications, notably eliminating the option for individuals to collect multiple pensions, allowing them to choose only one. New pension calculations will be based on the average salary of the last two years rather than the final drawn salary. Additionally, annual pension increases will cease; future increments will be treated separately from the base pension. This overhaul, effective from 1 January , stems from recommendations made by the Pay and Pension Commission in 2020. *—PTI*

Saudi Arabia executes 6 Iranians for drug smuggling

BEIRUT, 2 JAN

Saudi Arabia has executed six Iranian men for drug smuggling, eliciting strong condemnation from Iran as the two nations attempt to mend ties. The Saudi Interior Ministry announced that the individuals were caught smuggling hashish and were executed following the rejection of their appeal by the Supreme Court. While no specific date for the executions was provided, the ministry stated that the punishment aligns with Islamic law and aims to protect citizens from the pervasive issue of drugs. In response, Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Saudi ambassador to lodge a protest, with plans for a delegation to discuss the matter further in Riyadh. *—PTI*

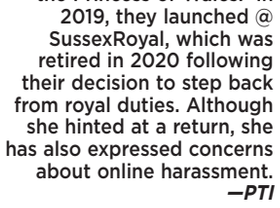


PHOTO: X

Meghan Markle returns to Insta with New Year video

NEW YORK, 2 JAN

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, has begun the new year with the launch of her first Instagram account since 2020. The Associated Press confirmed that @meghan is officially hers, and it has already attracted over 200,000 followers. Her inaugural post features a black-and-white video of the Duchess at the beach, dressed in white and drawing "2025" in the sand on an overcast day. Meghan, who married Prince Harry in 2018, previously shared a joint account, @KensingtonRoyal, with Harry's brother, Prince William, and his wife, Kate, the Princess of Wales. In 2019, they launched @SussexRoyal, which was retired in 2020 following their decision to step back from royal duties. Although she hinted at a return, she has also expressed concerns about online harassment. *—PTI*

Bangladesh said they tried to free the textbooks from exaggerated, imposed history
PHOTO: PTI

Mujib no longer 'Father of Nation' in revised B'desh books

DHAKA, 2 JAN

Bangladesh has introduced new textbooks that state that Ziaur Rahman declared the country's independence in 1971, replacing the previous ones crediting founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with the declaration, according to a media report.

The new textbooks for primary and secondary students have several changes, The Daily Star newspaper said. The textbooks also removed the title "Father of the Nation" for Mujibur Rahman.

The new textbooks for the 2025 academic year will state that "on 26 March, 1971, Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh, and on 27 March, he made another declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu," the paper quoted Prof AKM Reazul Hassan, chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, as saying.

The information has been included in the free textbooks where the matter of the declaration was mentioned, he added.

According to the paper, writer and researcher Rakhal Raha said they tried to free the textbooks from "exaggerated, imposed history".

"Those who revised the textbooks found that it wasn't fact-based information that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent the wireless message [declaring independence] while being arrested by the Pakistani army, and so they decided to remove it."

Earlier, in the textbooks of classes one to 10, the information on who made the Declaration of Independence was changed according to the government in power, the paper said.

It is widely believed among supporters of Awami League that Mujibur Rahman had made the announcement and that Ziaur Rahman, who was an Army major and later a sector commander of the Liberation War, merely read out the declaration upon Mujib's instructions. *—PTI*

Pakistan's internet shutdowns face legal uncertainty

ISLAMABAD, 2 JAN

The chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has acknowledged that restricting internet access falls into a 'legal grey area' and urged the ministries of law and interior to provide clarification on its legality.

During a briefing to the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology on Wednesday, retired Maj-Gen Hafeezur Rehman stated that internet shutdowns have been occurring since 2016, and it is only recently that their legality has been questioned, Dawn reported.

He further mentioned that the ministries of law and interior need to issue a conclusive legal opinion on the issue. During the meeting, committee members interrogated the head of the telecom regulator regarding the practice of shutting down internet services, especially when ordered by the Ministry of Interior. *—ANI*

Israeli airstrike kills 18 in Gaza, including 3 children

DEIR AL-BALAH, 2 JAN

Palestinian officials say an Israeli airstrike has killed 18 people in the Gaza Strip, including three children and two high-ranking officers in the Hamas-run police force.

The strike early Thursday hit a tent in an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone known as Muwasi, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people are sheltering in tents during the cold and rainy winter.

It killed three children, three women and four men, according to the Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies.

Among the dead were Maj Gen Mahmoud Salah, general director of the Gaza police, and his deputy, Brig Gen Hossam Shahwan, according to hospital records.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The Hamas-run government in Gaza included tens of thousands of police who maintained a high level of public order before the outbreak of the war.

The police have largely vanished from the streets in many areas after being targeted by Israel, contributing to the breakdown of law and order that has hindered the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid. But residents say plainclothes Hamas security men still patrol much of the territory, and the group has faced no significant internal challenge nearly 15 months into the devastating war sparked by its 7 Oct, 2023 attack into Israel.

Hamas killed some 1,200 people and abducted around 250 that day. *—PTI*

The body of a victim of an Israeli army strike is carried for funeral at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Gaza
PHOTO: PTI

S Korea bans Jeju Air CEO from leaving country

PHOTO: X

SEOUL, 2 JAN

South Korean authorities probe the country's deadliest air disaster, banning Jeju Air CEO Kim E-bae from leaving the country. Police conduct raids at the airline's offices and airport as part of the investigation.

The move came as aviation authorities stepped up their probe into the cause of Jeju Air Flight 2216 on Sunday, which killed 179 of 181 people on board, with the police issuing a statement saying they planned to "swiftly and rigorously determine the cause and responsibility" for the accident.

On Thursday morning, the Jeonnam Provincial Police Agency carried out "search and seizure operations" at Muan airport where flight 2216 crashed, a regional aviation office in the southwestern city, and Jeju Air's office in the capital SeoulSouth Korean authorities said on Wednesday that they extracted the initial data from one of the Boeing 737-800's two black boxes, with the other to be sent to the US for analysis due to damage it suffered in the crash.

South Korean officials have launched an inspection of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft in operation as well as a wider probe of the country's entire airline operations. The country's acting president, Choi Sang-mok, said on Thursday that immediate action must be taken if the inspections revealed any problems with the aircraft model. "As there's great public concern about the same aircraft model involved in the accident, the transport ministry and relevant organisations must conduct a thorough inspection of operation maintenance, education, and training," Choi said. *—Agencies*

ROMANCE ACROSS BORDER

Indian man crosses into Pak for marriage, held

LAHORE, 2 JAN

A 30-year-old Indian man crossed over illegally into Pakistan to meet a Facebook friend he wanted to marry, but instead found himself behind bars. And the woman told the local police she does not want to tie the knot.

Badal Babu from the Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh was arrested last week in the Mandi Bahauddin district of Pakistan's Punjab province (some 240 kms from Lahore) for illegal border crossing.

Police have recorded the statement of Babu's Facebook friend Sana Rani, 21, who said she wasn't interested in marrying him.

"In her statement to police, Sana Rani says that Babu and she have been friends on Facebook for the last two-and-a-half years. But she is not interested in marrying him," a Punjab police officer, Nasir Shah, told PTI on Thursday.

When asked whether Babu met Rani, the police officer said he couldn't confirm this.

Upon his arrest, Babu narrated his "love story" to the police. Babu was detained under Pakistan's Foreign Act sections 13 and 14 as he was travelling without any legal documents.

Later, he was presented before a court, which placed him in judicial custody for 14 days. The next hearing is on 10 January.

According to family sources,

PHOTO: X

Babu was very active on Facebook, where he reportedly connected with a girl from Pakistan. After informing his parents that he would be heading to Delhi for work, Babu left his village after Raksha Bandhan in August.

Just before Diwali, his family received a video call on WhatsApp, in which Babu reassured them that he was safe, had found a job and was using a friend's phone because he could not afford his own. His family later learned that Babu had somehow crossed the international border near Jammu, although these details remain unconfirmed, the Indian sources said.

The family has now appealed to the Indian government, particularly to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to intervene for Babu's release.

"We want our son back. We don't know how to bring him home," Babu's mother told local reporters. *—PTI*

Impeached Yoon vows to fight against detainment warrant

SEOUL, 2 JAN

Yoon Suk Yeol **PHOTO: X**

Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol addressed a gathering of conservative supporters outside his residence, pledging to "fight to the end" against what he described as "anti-state forces." This declaration comes as law enforcement prepares to detain him following a Seoul court's issuance of a detainment warrant related to a controversial martial law decree.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials has a week to execute the warrant. Yoon has previously resisted requests for questioning, obstructing investigations into potential rebellion charges stemming from his brief power grab on 3 December . Chief prosecutor Oh Dong-woon indicated police may be deployed if Yoon's security service resists. Yoon emphasised the importance of defending "liberal democracy and constitutional order." However, the opposition Democratic Party has accused him of inciting his supporters to impede his detention and urged prompt enforcement of the warrant. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 85.73 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as strong dollar demand from importers and foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the dollar gained against most currencies during 2024 and continued to remain on a strong footing this year. Moreover, persistent foreign fund outflows further dented investors' sentiments. Additionally, global markets are expected to see low volumes as the holiday season is underway in major economies like those in Europe. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.79 and a high of 85.68 against the American currency. On Wednesday, the rupee settled flat at 85.64 against the US dollar.—*PTI*

Gold climbs to ₹ 79K per 10 gm; silver rises ₹130

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Gold prices climbed Rs 330 to Rs 79,720 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to persistent buying by jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal ended at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Silver also rose Rs 130 to Rs 90,630 per 10 grams on Thursday. The white metal finished at Rs 90,500 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped Rs 330 to Rs 79,170 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 78,840 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Traders said a rally in the precious metal rates in the international markets, which aided in bullion prices. —*PTI*

Waaree Energies bags 150MWp solar modules order

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Waaree Energies on Thursday said it has secured an order to supply solar modules totalling a capacity of 150 MWp for a major renewable project in India. The contract includes the supply of Waaree's flagship high-efficiency Glass N-type Topcon bifacial modules, rated at 585/590Wp, a company statement said. These modules are recognised for their durability, exceptional energy output, and advanced technology, it stated. According to the statement, Waaree Energies Ltd., India's largest solar PV module manufacturer and a leader in the global energy transition, is pleased to announce the receipt of order for a major renewable power project of 150MW for the supply of solar modules from a renowned customer engaged in owning, developing, and operating renewable power projects in India—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Nasscom names Jyoti Sharma as CEO

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Nasscom foundation on Thursday announced the appointment of Jyoti Sharma as its new Chief Executive Officer, effective immediately. Succeeding Nidhi Bhasin, Sharma brings over 20 years of experience in driving social impact and leading program development, resource mobilisation, and stakeholder engagement, according to a company statement. "Her visionary leadership and deep expertise will be instrumental in scaling our impact through our flagship programmes, broadening our reach, and driving meaningful change through the innovative use of technology," nasscom foundation Chairman Rostow Ravanan said. Nasscom foundation is a not-for-profit organisation representing the Indian tech industry. —*PTI*

Market surges 2% on buying in financial, IT stocks

Sensex jumps 1,436 points; Nifty surges 445.75 points

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

Benchmark Sensex rallied 1,436 points to close at a two-week high on Thursday on buying in financial, auto and IT shares.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,436.30 points or 1.83 per cent -- its best single-day gain in more than a month -- to settle at 79,943.71. During the day, it soared 1,525.46 points or 1.94 per cent to 80,032.87.

The NSE Nifty surged 445.75 points or 1.88 per cent to 24,188.65.

From 30 Sensex shares, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 8 per cent while Bajaj Finance soared over 6 per cent. Maruti, Titan, Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech, Zomato, UltraTech Cement and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other major gainers.

Sun Pharma emerged as the only laggard. The gross GST collection rose 7.3 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1.77 lakh crore in December despite a significant increase in both domestic and export refunds.

India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 12-month low in December, as new business orders and production expanded at softer rates, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

Sun Pharma is the only laggard

PHOTO: PTI

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index was at 56.4 in December, down from 56.5 in November, indicating a weaker improvement in operating conditions.

Despite the decline, the headline figure remained above its long-run average of 54.1 thereby signalling a robust rate of growth.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets were closed on Wednesday for New Year holiday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,782.71 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.09 per cent to USD 75.47 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark climbed 368.40 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 78,507.41 on the first trading session of 2025 on Wednesday. The Nifty went up by 98.10 points or 0.41 per cent to 23,742.90. —*PTI*

HIGHER MATERIAL COSTS

Dec manufacturing growth at 12 month-low

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

India's manufacturing sector witnessed a decline in growth, hitting a 12-month low in December, according to a recent survey. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) registered at 56.4 in December, a slight dip from November's 56.5, highlighting a softer improvement in operating conditions. Despite this decrease, the PMI remains well above the long-term average of 54.1, indicating a sustained rate of expansion. A score above 50 signifies growth, while a score below reflects contraction.

Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, remarked that "India's manufacturing activity ended a strong 2024 on a softer note," mentioning a noticeable slowing trend in the industrial sector. The survey noted that the pace of new orders grew at its slowest rate of the year, suggesting potential challenges for future production.

The sector faced difficulties due to increased competition and price pressures. However, there was a notable uptick in new export orders, which rose at the fastest rate since July. The report indicated that while the growth of export sales lagged behind total new business, it did strengthen thanks to firms securing international contracts. The sector continued to expand, leading to increased purchasing activity and a modest rise in employment, with approximately 10 per cent of companies hiring additional staff.

PHOTO: PTI

Manufacturers experienced rising costs related to materials and labour, contributing to an increase in overall expenses. Looking ahead to 2025, manufacturers expressed optimistic forecasts for output growth, buoyed by marketing efforts, investment, and strong demand, despite concerns over inflation and competitive pressures. —*PTI*

India sugar production declines by 16% in Oct-Dec: ISMA

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Sugar production fell by 16 per cent to 95.40 lakh tonne in the first quarter of the ongoing current marketing year that started in October, mainly due to a decline in output in Maharashtra, according to industry body ISMA data released on Thursday. Mills had manufactured 113.01 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period. The production data excludes the diversion of sugar for ethanol making. According to the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA), crushing rate in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka was better than last year.

PHOTO: PTI

However, the crushing rate suffered in Uttar Pradesh during the last week of December 2024 due to a temporary disruption in cane supply owing to rains.

During the first quarter, 493 mills were operational as against 512 factories a year ago. Sugar production in Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest producer, declined to 32.80 lakh tonnes during the first quarter of the ongoing 2024-25 marketing year (October-September), from 34.35 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period. The production in Maharashtra, the country's second-largest producer, declined sharply to 30 lakh tonnes from 38.20 lakh tonnes a year ago, while that in Karnataka fell to 20.40 lakh tonnes from 24.91 lakh tonnes. ISMA will come out with its second advance estimates of sugar production by January-end.

The industry body has projected domestic sugar consumption to be lower at 280 lakh tonne in the 2024-25 marketing year. —*PTI*

GST RELIEF CRUCIAL

India's non-life insurance industry to see double-digit growth by 2025

KOLKATA, 2 JAN

Despite stagnation in general insurance penetration across India, non-life insurers are optimistic about achieving double-digit growth by 2025, buoyed by a supportive regulatory framework and innovative product launches tailored to meet specific consumer needs. Stakeholders have indicated that favourable outcomes regarding GST relief and a review of motor third-party insurance rates will be crucial for realising this potential.

PHOTO: PTI

Anup Rau, CEO of Future Generali India Insurance Company Ltd, noted that while health insurance will remain a key driver, growth is also expected in non-motor and non-health sectors such as pet insurance, professional indemnity, and housing insurance. The industry currently predicts a 14 per cent annual growth rate, indicating significant advancements in digital integration and personalised services.

Anuj Tyagi, Managing Director and CEO of HDFC ERGO General Insurance, stressed the necessity of making insurance more affordable and accessible, with a focus on innovation in product development and customer service that reaches beyond metropolitan areas to tier 2 and 3 cities.

Tapan Singhel, Managing Director and CEO of Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, emphasised that the industry will undergo transformative changes, with cyber insurance becoming increasingly relevant alongside parametric insurance models for disaster management.

The latest report from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) showed an increase in insurance density in the non-life sector to USD 25, up from USD 22 in the previous year. —*PTI*

GTRI seeks steel sector review before imposing curbs

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Economic think tank GTRI on Thursday called for a comprehensive assessment of the Indian steel industry to evaluate the impact of existing import measures before imposing the proposed safeguard duty.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) report has also claimed that the commerce ministry's ongoing safeguard investigation into alleged jump in imports of certain steel products suffers from "several" technical weaknesses such as focus on products with minimal import surges, and inappropriate use of global safeguards.

It stressed, any new measures should be based on a clear understanding of the implications of existing measures for the industry and the broader economy. "Conduct a study on the state of the steel industry in India and assess the impact of proposed and existing import measures on resulting higher costs, economic growth and jobs. Take any new action after this assessment," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

PHOTO: PTI

He said that the current system comprising Quality Control Orders, Steel Import Monitoring System, and No Objection Certificate, requirements is "overly" complex and inefficient. The report has suggested that a high-level review is essential to simplify these processes and make compliance automatic and hassle-free. "The licensing process for foreign manufacturers should be easier, with potential collaboration with international labs for quality control," it said, adding the import process has become overly bureaucratic and inefficient, causing delays and unnecessary hurdles for importers. —*PTI*

OFFICE DEMAND IN KEY BUSINESS HUBS OUTPACES SUPPLY

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

India's key office markets Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Gurugram are witnessing higher demand for premium workspaces than new supply and this will lead to a drop in vacancy rates as well as an increase in rentals during 2025, Mindspace Business Parks REIT CEO Ramesh Nair said.

"As we step into 2025, India's office market stands at the cusp of transformative change, mirroring the dynamism of the nation's economy and its burgeoning workforce. This year will be shaped by a synergy of technology, and evolving priorities, redefining the way organisations utilise and perceive office spaces," he said.

"Vacancy rates are projected to drop in like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune as demand outpaces supply. This will create competitive leasing conditions and push rents upward. Developers will need to accelerate timelines to meet the surging demand," Nair said. —*PTI*

'High interest rates hurt export competitiveness'

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Indian exporters are encountering severe liquidity challenges due to high interest rates and a reduction in export finance, which are threatening their competitive edge, according to Sanjay Budhia, Chairman of the Confederation of Indian Industry National Committee on EXIM. Budhia urged the government and banking sector to collaborate on effective solutions, including an extension of the interest equalisation scheme that lapsed on 31 December for an additional three years, particularly for manufacturing exporters and MSMEs (micro, small, and medium enterprises).

Sanjay Budhia

He emphasised that this extension is vital, as the current limited support disadvantages Indian manufacturers. Budhia also highlighted the need to increase the interest subsidy for pre- and post-shipment credit from 3 to 5 per cent in pivotal sectors like leather, engineering, apparel, and gems and jewellery.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) echoed Budhia's call for a five-year extension of the scheme in the forthcoming Budget scheduled for 1 February. Furthermore, he suggested expanding Letter of Credit facilities for large overseas projects and enhancing export credit guarantee programmes.

- Recent data indicates a 5 per cent decline in export credit, from Rs 2,27,452 crore in March 2022 to Rs 2,17,406 crore in March 2024. Export credit saw a drastic drop of over 40 per cent

Recent data indicates a 5 per cent decline in export credit, from Rs 2,27,452 crore in March 2022 to Rs 2,17,406 crore in March 2024. Additionally, export credit under priority sector lending saw a drastic drop of over 40 per cent during the same period. —*PTI*

APR-OCT FY25

India's textile exports grow 7% to $21B

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

India's textiles and apparel exports, including handicrafts, grew 7 per cent during the April-October period to USD 21.35 billion, the government said on Thursday.

The outbound shipments from the sector stood at USD 20 billion in the same period of the previous financial year, FY 2023-24.

"The Ready-Made Garments (RMG) category with exports of USD 8,733 million has the largest share (41 per cent) in the total exports (USD 21,358 million) during the period of April-October of FY 2024-25, followed by Cotton Textiles (33 per cent, USD 7,082 million), Man-Made Textiles (15 per cent, USD 3,105 million)," the Textiles Ministry said.

India was the sixth largest exporter of textiles in 2023

PHOTO: X

Growth of exports was observed in all principal commodities during April-October of FY 2024-25, as compared to corresponding period of FY 2023-24, except wool and handloom, which declined by 19 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively, the Ministry said.

Meanwhile, the overall import of textiles and apparel including handicrafts declined 1 per cent during the April-October period of FY 2024-25 (USD 5,425 million), compared to the same period of FY 2023-24 (USD 5,464 million).

The man-made textiles category with import of USD 1,859 million has the largest share (34 per cent) in the total imports (USD 5,425 million) during the period of April-October of FY 2024-25, as there is a demand-supply gap in this sector, the Ministry said.

"Growth of imports is observed majorly in Cotton Textiles mainly on account of import of long staple cotton fibre and such trends of import indicates an increase in production capacity of the country amidst rising consumption and self-reliance," the official statement said.

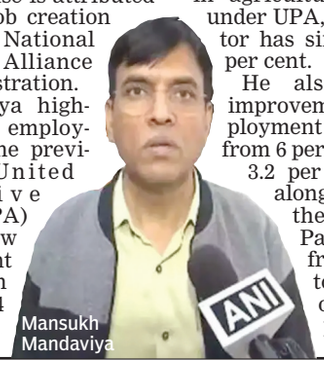
India was the sixth largest exporter of textiles and apparel in the world in 2023. —*PTI*

Employment rate soars 36% under Modi, says Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, 2 JAN

Union Labour Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya announced on Thursday that employment in India surged by 36 per cent, reaching 64.33 crore in 2023-24, a significant increase from 47.15 crore in 2014-15. This rise is attributed to improved job creation during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) administration.

Dr Mandaviya highlighted that employment under the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government saw only a 7 per cent growth between 2004 and 2014, with the addition of merely 2.9 crore jobs. In stark contrast, the Modi government has added 17.19 crore jobs from 2014 to 2024. He reported that approximately 4.6 crore jobs were created in the past year alone.



Mansukh Mandaviya

He noted a 16 per cent decline in agricultural employment under UPA, whereas the sector has since grown by 19 per cent.

He also revealed an improvement in the unemployment rate, which fell from 6 per cent in 2017-18 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24, alongside a growth in the Labour Force Participation Rate from 49.8 per cent to 60.1 per cent over the same period. —*PTI*

Birth of 2nd child: Cummins may miss tour of Sri Lanka

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

Australia captain Pat Cummins hinted that he may skip the tour of Sri Lanka later this month to be present for the birth of his second child. Australia are scheduled to play two Tests in Sri Lanka on 29 January and 6 February, around the same time his wife -- Becky -- is due to give birth. In Cummins absence, Steve Smith or Travis Head will lead Australia. Cummins revealed that his mother's death last year had a profound impact on reshaping his priorities in life. The pacer had returned midway through the tour of India to be with his mother when she passed away. —*PTI*

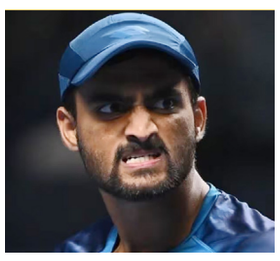


PHOTO:X

Bollipalli-Haase exit Brisbane International

BRISBANE, 2 JAN

Rithivik Choudary Bollipalli, the latest Indian player to make a steady progress on the ATP doubles circuit, on Thursday made a pre-quarterfinal exit from the Brisbane International along with partner Robin Haase. The Indo-Duch team lost 4-6 2-6 to local alternate combination of Rinky Hijikata and Jason Kubler in 65 minutes in the ATP 250 tournament ahead of the Australian Open -- season's first Grand Slam, starting 12 January. Bollipalli is set to make his Major debut in Melbourne. N Sriram Balaji and Miguel Reyes-Varela had exited the tournament with a 4-6 2-6 defeat against Manuel Guinard and Arthur Rinderknech in the opening round. Another Indian who opened his 2025 campaign this week was Yuki Bhambri, who lost the Hong Kong Tennis Open quarterfinal with French partner Albano Olivetti. —*PTI*

US footballer James joins German club

HAMBURG, 2 JAN

United States midfielder James Sands has joined Bundesliga team St. Pauli on a six-month loan from New York City FC, the teams announced. The German club will have an option to extend the loan to keep the 24-year-old Sands through the 2025-26 season, the MLS team said. It will be the defensive midfielder's second spell in Europe after the New York native spent just over a year with Rangers in the Scottish Premiership. Sands joined Rangers on loan in January 2022 and made 41 appearances in all competitions for the Glasgow club. He has played 13 times for the U.S. national team. St. Pauli earned promotion to the Bundesliga by winning the German second-division title last season. The team is in 14th place in the 18-team league.—*PTI*

Kapil Dev promises to meet Vinod Kambli soon

MUMBAI, 2 JAN

Legendary all-rounder Kapil Dev has promised former India batter Vinod Kambli, who walked out of a Thane hospital here, to visit him at the earliest. Kambli was admitted in ICU on 21 December due to health complications which included urinary infection and cramps but doctors later said the 52-year-old also had clots in his brain. On Wednesday, Kambli moved out of the hospital appearing physically frail but high in spirits, and posed for photographs with the hospital staff, besides playing a short game of cricket. Shailesh Thakur, director of Akruti Hospital, said during Kambli's hospitalisation, he had also made a video call to former India captain Kapil Dev whose batch of 1983 World Cup winners have also extended their offer to help the Mumbai cricketer.—*PTI*

Is Gambhir-Rohit split wide open now?

Coach & captain hardly speak while inspecting centre strip ahead of fifth Test today

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

It was around half past one when Gautam Gambhir walked towards the centre strip at the Sydney Cricket Ground with Jasprit Bumrah in tow.

A few minutes later, Rohit Sharma also joined the duo in the middle but there was hardly any communication between the head coach and the designated captain.

In the media interaction, Gambhir also spoke about "honesty" and "performance being only criteria to be in Indian dressing room" and soon after that, he was seen engaged in a conversation with Bumrah while the rest of his teammates were warming up with a round of foot volley.

All present at the SCG witnessed a complete communication breakdown between skipper and the head coach.

Rohit is no longer in coach Gautam Gambhir's scheme of things after scoring just one second innings half-century in the eight Tests that he has played this season.

Cricket administrator talks to head coach

It is learnt that an influential cricket administrator, who commands a lot of respect in the BCCI, has had a word with the head coach to explore if the skipper can be allowed to play the Sydney game and bow out from the Test arena. However, the head coach's priority is to ensure India wins in Sydney and remains in hunt for a place in the WTC final.

Such is the state of affairs that Rohit was more comfortable speaking to his deputy Bumrah and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar than Gambhir.

After a game of foot volley in which Rohit and Rishabh Pant were on one side and Virat Kohli on the other, suddenly the penny dropped with a different looking slip cordon.

While Pant was behind the stumps for the slip catching session, the formation behind the batter had Virat Kohli at first slip, KL Rahul at second, Nitish Kumar Reddy at third with Yashasvi Jaiswal manning the gully.

There were no signs of Rohit yet as one headed to the net practice area outside the main stadium.

After nearly 35 minutes, Rohit quietly walked into the net arena and without his kit.

After the top-order had almost finished their session, Rohit entered the nets. It was just like MCG where he had come to bat after all recognised batters had finished their stint even though he was set to open the innings.

How did Rohit look during his 30-odd minutes of practice? To be honest, he looked a shadow of his old self. He was bowled after missing the line of T Dilip's throwdown. His reaction to deliveries were late.

Meanwhile, Gambhir said at the pre-match press conference, "Indian cricket's transition is in safe hands as long as there are honest people in the dressing room. Only criteria to be in that dressing room is performance."

Asserting that "debates" in the dressing room should not come out in public domain, Gambhir said he has had some "honest" conversations with his players and that the ongoing transition in the team will be all-encompassing.

Trailing 1-2, a win for Australia will seal their place in the final at the Lord's against South Africa in the World Test Championship.

India, on other hand, not only require a win but also need Sri Lanka to not lose any of their two Tests at home against Pat Cummins' men to qualify for the WTC finals.

He may or may not announce retirement but playing the traditional format after Sydney looks a long shot.

Add to this the murmurs of dissension in the team that could have a bearing on how the players perform.

The implosion started with Ravichandran Ashwin retiring and going back home midway through the series and Rohit's poor form has certainly made him lose a bit of command.

Rishabh Pant in line of fire

There are reports that Rishabh Pant's shot selection has invited the wrath of Gambhir, who is now planning a rap on the knuckles by dropping him in favour of Dhruv Jurel.

If Pant is indeed axed from the game, it would be a redux of the time when Kapil Dev was taught a lesson for his poor shot selection during a 1984 tour of England.

During practice on Thursday, Jurel got the same net time as his senior.

Pant was also seen engaged in a long conversation with vice-captain Bumrah.

India will also have to make one change owing to Akash Deep's stiff back that has forced him out.

The coach's favourite Harshit Rana could be in but with his questionable consistency and drop in speed in the second and third spells, Prasidh Krishna can't be ruled out either.

Aus drops Marsh

In this backdrop, facing an Australian team with Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne back in form isn't an easy proposition.

"I haven't actually noticed as I am in my own bubble," Pat Cummins said when asked about whether he noticed that in the rival camp, another out-of-form batter Virat Kohli has been looking more proactive in the leadership role than the regular skipper.

The Australian team will be handing a debut to all-rounder Beau Webster, who would replace an off-colour Mitchell Marsh who hasn't scored much runs throughout the series.

Cummins will also have Mitchell Starc for company as he has been cleared after back scans.

The pitch, according to Cummims, is seamer-friendly. —*PTI*

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA

Pat Cummins (captain), Sam Konstas, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Alex Carey (wk), Beau Webster, Mitchell Starc, Scott Boland & Nathan Lyon

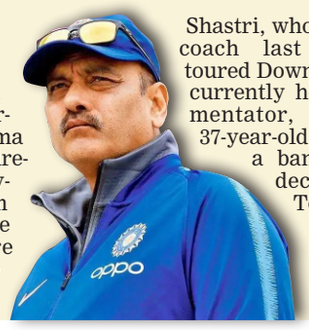
INDIA (not confirmed)

Jasprit Bumrah (Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant (wk), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana, Prasidh, Nitish, Tanush, Sarfaraz Khan

Won't be surprised if Rohit retires from Test cricket: Shastri

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri will not be surprised if under-fire captain Rohit Sharma announces his Test retirement in near future, saying talented and in-form youngsters like Shubman Gill are knocking hard on the doors of the side.



Shastri, who was the head coach last time India toured Down Under and is currently here as a commentator, wants the 37-year-old to go out with a bang if he does decide on his Test future.

"He'll take a call on his career but I won't be shocked at all (if Sharma retires) because he's not getting younger," said Shastri on ICC Review.

Rohit has looked far from the class batter that he is and Shastri wants the opener to play with absolute freedom. —*PTI*

CT: PCB races against time for stadium renovation

National Stadium in Karachi is hosting the opening match of Champions Trophy between Pakistan and New Zealand on 19 February **PHOTO: X**

KARACHI, 2 JAN

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is in a race against time to complete renovations at the National Stadium before next month's Champions Trophy. All matches initially scheduled at the venue have been relocated amid ongoing construction work.

The National Stadium is set to host the opening match of the prestigious ICC event between Pakistan and New Zealand on 19 February. Due to the extensive renovation, which threatens to delay the project further and disrupt player activities, officials decided that no matches would be played at the stadium.

The Quaid-e-Azam Trophy final, Pakistan's premier first-class cricket event, commenced on Thursday at the smaller UBL Complex following its shift from the National Stadium. Additionally, the PCB announced that the upcoming two-Test series against the West Indies will now take place in Multan instead of Karachi, as renovations continued to delay preparations.

Some construction work, which was meant to be completed by 15 December, was finished just in time, leading to new directives for the construction company to expedite the schedule. The PCB is undertaking a substantial renovation project worth Rs 12 billion across all three venues expected to host the Champions Trophy, including Lahore and Rawalpindi.

Improvements include refurbishing the main stadium building. —*PTI*

Watson: India's CT no-show in Pak is unfortunate

SYDNEY, 2 JAN

Former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson expressed disappointment over India's inability to travel to Pakistan for the upcoming Champions Trophy, noting it as "unfortunate." Speaking at the Champions Trophy Tour in Sydney, Watson highlighted the significance of India-Pakistan matches, describing them as "special" events that carry immense intensity.

India will play its matches at a neutral venue in Dubai under the ICC's new hybrid model for the tournament. Watson emphasised the importance of the Champions Trophy in the cricketing calendar, bridging the four-year gap between ODI World Cups. He believes the tournament keeps the ODI format lively and relevant amidst the rise of T20 and the sustained prominence of Test cricket.

Watson praised Virat Kohli's impressive ODI statistics, including over 13,900 runs, asserting that Kohli's mastery of the format will shine through. —*PTI*

GUKESH CALLS ON ADANI

World chess champion Gukesh Dommaraju along with his parents met billionaire Gautam Adani in Ahmedabad on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

SL beat NZ in third T20, but lose series 2-1

NELSON, 2 JAN

Kusal Perera blazed his way to Sri Lanka's fastest Twenty20 International century, scoring 100 runs off just 44 balls, and led his team to a thrilling seven-run victory over New Zealand in the final match of their three-match series.

Batting first for the first time in the series, Sri Lanka posted an impressive 218-5, a total only surpassed by one other in their T20 history. Perera's remarkable performance featured 13 fours and four sixes, and he built a vital partnership with captain Charith Asalanka.

Despite holding a commanding 2-0 series lead after winning the first two matches, New Zealand fell agonisingly short in their chase, finishing at 211-7. The teams will face off again on Sunday for the first of 3 ODIs in Wellington. -*AP*

Ivory Coast's Seko Fofana joins French club Rennes

RENNES, 2 JAN

Ivory Coast midfielder Seko Fofana ended his brief spell in Saudi Arabia to sign a long-term contract with French club Rennes.

The 29-year-old Fofana helped Lens to a second-place finish in Ligue 1 in 2022-23, and Rennes hopes he can provide a similar boost for the Brittany club.

Rennes said Fofana signed a four-and-a-half year deal. Financial terms were not disclosed. The team is in 12th place.

"There are some talented players at Rennes and I don't think the club is where it should be," Fofana said in the team's announcement. "We're going to get the chance to play a series of games and show that the start of the season was below the club's potential. I hope we can turn things around very quick."

Fofana scored 21 goals and provided 12 assists over 112 appearances for Lens.

In July 2023, he joined Al Nassr — where Cristiano Ronaldo plays — in the Saudi Pro League and then was loaned to Al-Ettifaq six months later.

Fofana had played four seasons for Udinese in Serie A. He has made 25 appearances for Ivory Coast and helped the team win the Africa Cup of Nations in February. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal beat Brentford, climb to 2nd spot

LONDON, 2 JAN

Arsenal returned to second place in the Premier League after a solid 3-1 victory against Brentford at the Gtech Community Stadium on Wednesday. Mikel Arteta's side leapfrogged Nottingham Forest and reduced the gap to league leaders Liverpool to six points.

Despite the triumph, Arteta expressed no immediate urgency to bolster the squad during the January transfer window. "If there's an opportunity, we'll look at it," he stated. "I really like my players. I really value what we have, because it's a lot of quality and a lot of commitment from all of them."

The match featured 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri, who made his first Premier League start due to the injury of Bukayo Saka. Nwaneri played a significant role in the second-half goals scored by Mikel Merino and Gabriel Martinelli. Bryan Mbeumo had initially given Brentford the lead in the 13th minute, but Gabriel Jesus equalised just before the half-hour mark, netting his sixth goal in four matches. Merino scored in the 50th minute before Martinelli added a third just three minutes later.

Arsenal may have found a diamond in Ethan Nwaneri (left) who starred in the win at Brentford **PHOTO: AP**

This marks Arsenal's second consecutive win without Saka, who is expected to miss several months due to a hamstring injury sustained against Crystal Palace. The team has extended its unbeaten streak to 12 matches across all competitions. Liverpool will face Manchester United on Sunday. Meanwhile, Brentford remains in 12th place, having lost three of their last four Premier League outings. In injury news, Kai Havertz was sent home with illness, while Declan Rice came on as a substitute in 78th minute. —*AP*

India women beat Maldives by 11-1

BENGALURU, 2 JAN

Dishing out an impressive show on debut, forward Lhingdeikim struck four goals in Indian women team's comprehensive 11-1 win over Maldives in its second FIFA friendly contest, here Thursday.

In the first match, the hosts had thrashed the rivals 14-0.

Lhingdeikim (12th, 16th, 56th and 59th) scored two goals in each half whereas the other debutant in the contest, Nongmeikapam Sibani Devi, scored once (45+1) in the extra time of the first half.

The others who scored in the contest were Kajol D'Souza (15th), Pooja (41st), Simran Gurung (62nd, 68th) and Khumukcham Bhumika Devi (71st).

Mariyam Rifa scored the only goal for Maldives in the 27th minute but an own goal from the visitors' skipper Hawwa Haneefa in the 17th added to India's tally.

India coach Joakim Alexandersson had announced six changes for this contest in whch Lhingdeikim and Sibani Devi made their debuts in the starting eleven whereas Ribansi Jamu, Thingbaijam Sanjita Devi, Juhi Singh, Monisha Singha, Bhumika Devi and Gurung made their debuts off the bench.

India were ahead 6-1 in the first half after goalkeeper Linthoingambi Devi had to make a couple of regulation saves early on.

The team founds its going soon and was up by four goals in the first 17 minutes.

Maldives were reduced to 10 players for the last 20 minutes after Maeesha Abdul Hannan was sent off for a deliberate hand-ball inside the penalty box. —*PTI*